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THE

MINOR PROPHETS.

BY

REV. JOHN ADAMS, B.D.,

INVERKEILOR.

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THE MINOR PROPHETS. By Rev. JOHN ADAMS, B.D.,

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THE MINOR PROPHETS.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY.

I. ISRAEL'S IDEAL.—The ideal of a people is best seen at the close of its history. The powers which lie dormant in the savage reveal less of the ideal in man than the faculties developed in us ; and the nation which has been evolved through discipline is a truer embodiment of the original divine idea than the same nation or society at its birth. The oak and not the acorn is the fullest representation of a tree. Regarded in this way, Israel, the people of Jehovah, was meant to be a religious community. Instead of aspiring to be a world-power able to hold her own amid the shock of empires, she was destined to hand on to future ages, not a political economy, but a religion. She was summoned to hold aloft the torch of revelation, and thus fulfil the part of a great missionary people. Her ideal was not political, but religious. She was not an empire, but a Church.

The spirituality of this ideal was imperilled in two ways—(1) By the dream of political supremacy which was corrected by the discipline of history ;

and (2) by the attractions of Baal worship which were exposed by the teaching of the prophets. We may glance at both of these in their order.

1. *The Dream of Political Supremacy and the Discipline of History.*

According to the term introduced by Josephus, Israel was not a monarchy, but a *theocracy*. Jehovah Himself was the ruler of His people, and no one was to be appointed in His stead (*cf.* Judges viii. 23). In the lawless times of the Judges, however, a theocratic commonwealth was found to be impracticable. Each man did that which was right in his own eyes (xxi. 25). So that when the elders of Israel came to Samuel and said, "Make us a king to judge us like all the nations" (1 Sam. viii. 5), the Prophet felt that the question could no longer be evaded; the two ideals, political and religious, had at last come into collision. Deeply concerned as he was for the spiritual ideal, he would fain have used his influence against the monarchical principle, but Jehovah had decreed otherwise. As a necessary part of their divine training, He would allow them to become a monarchy. "He gave them their request, but sent leanness into their souls."

The step having been taken, no one rejoiced more than Samuel* did over the election of Saul. For was he not Jehovah's representative—the invisible deputy of Israel's invisible King, God's vicegerent on earth? This might be a theocracy even larger and better than his own—the Church might yet be

* In the last clause of 1 Sam. xi. 15, the Septuagint reads "Samuel" instead of Saul.

reached through the State. But when the youthful kingdom began its career of conquest under the brilliant leadership of David, and extended its boundaries far and wide, until it became the most powerful nation west of the Euphrates, little marvel if the political ideal began to dim the spiritual, and the glowing vision of a world-wide supremacy gradually gathered cogency and shape ; but—

“There’s a divinity that shapes our ends,
Rough-hew them how we will.”

To be a world-power superior to Egypt, or able to cope with Assyria, was not Israel’s calling ; and neither David’s successes nor Solomon’s glory could alter that divine fact. The political ideal must give place to the spiritual, whatever be the consequences ; and, therefore, at the close of Solomon’s long reign, we have the disruption of the tribes. This revolt was not the suicidal blunder that some would have us to believe. No doubt it left “two broken fragments of a State, often at war with one another, and each of them sure to become an easy prey to the Eastern conquerors when their victorious career should bring them to the West-land.”* But what if this weakening of the State was the means for strengthening the Church? What if the political unity had to be sacrificed in order to secure the permanence of the spiritual ideal? Would not this set the schism of the Hebrew tribes in another and truer light? And might not even this step in the providential leading of Israel be vindicated by the results? Be this as it may, the lesson for

* M’Curdy, “History, Prophecy, and the Monuments,” I. 252.

the people of Jehovah was too plain not to be understood. The northern tribes under Jeroboam had raised the standard of revolt against Rehoboam, and from that day their chance of becoming a world-power among the surrounding nations was shattered to pieces. The dream of a political supremacy was smitten by the discipline of history.

2. The attractions of Baal-worship, and the rise of the Prophets.

By Baal-worship is meant the sensuous and impure nature-worship which prevailed among the agricultural Canaanites even before the invasion of the Hebrews. It was a religion in every way adapted to an agricultural or pastoral life: but from the prominence it gave to the male and female elements in its conception of deity, it easily led the way to the grossest type of sexual impurity. Conceiving its deities as productive powers—givers of life, fertility, and increase—it not only thronged their sanctuaries at the great agricultural festivals, and worshipped them as the givers of its corn, wine, and oil (*cf.* Hos. ii. 5); but it also played the harlot there, on every high mountain and under every green tree, allowing its services to run into all those forms of orgiastic excess which have made the names of Baal and Ashtoreth the synonyms for all that is impure, cruel, and shameless. This was the second source of danger to which the spiritual ideal of Israel was openly exposed. From the time they entered Palestine as a pastoral or nomadic people, they were assailed by the seductive abominations of Canaanite worship.

The danger was constantly present, even from the beginning of the history, but it was greatly aggravated by the secession of the tribes under Jeroboam. Israel was now withdrawn from the Temple and worship of Jerusalem ; and while the calves of gold erected at Dan and Bethel were ostensibly dedicated to the worship of Jehovah, the line between these and the worship of the Canaanites was easily obliterated, and the time when Jehovah would be forgotten or transformed into a Canaanite Baal was brought appreciably nearer. That time arrived in the reign of Ahab. With the advent of Jezebel, his Tyrian queen, and the formal establishment of the Phœnician cult in the very capital of Samaria, it might well seem as if the dreaded exchange had at last been effected, and that Israel, the people of Jehovah, had accepted the religion of the Canaanites. Had this been the case, a greater calamity would have befallen the Israelitish nation than even the shattering of their political ideal. The religious, no less than the political, would have been destroyed. The Church, no less than the State, would have been doomed. But Providence had something better in store for the people of Jehovah than this. It had the ministry of the prophets. It is at this point that Elijah and Elisha appear upon the scene, and they are the forerunners of a class of men who were the greatest gift of God to the ancient world. Beginning with indignant protests against impiety and wrong-doing, they became distinctively preachers of righteousness, and while king and people were groping after foreign alliances, and impiously bowing the knee

in the house of Baal, they summoned all alike to a renewed allegiance to Jehovah, and demanded an absolute repudiation of idolatry. In this way they supplemented and interpreted the previous teaching of Jehovah in the discipline of history. "O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God, for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity."

3. *The fall of the State and the rise of the Church.*

The concluding chapter in Israel's history is a peculiarly solemn one. They did not profit as they might have done, either by discipline or teaching. The dream of political supremacy was never fully surrendered, and still less was the leaven of idolatry repudiated and cast out. Foreign entanglements, both in Israel and Judah, are a sufficient proof of the one; and the other is only too painfully evident, both in the sacrilege of the princes and in the superstition of the people. Even amid the woes that accompanied the siege of Jerusalem, the various forms of idolatry were freely practised within the city itself. Hebrew women might be heard wailing for the loss of the Syrian god Thammuz; and in the subterranean chambers beneath the temple, elders might be found offering clouds of incense before the animal forms of Egyptian idolatry (Ezek. viii. 8-18). Both Ephraim and Judah had become joined to their idols; and therefore, first in Samaria, and then in Jerusalem, we have the downfall of the State.

But Israel's extremity is Jehovah's opportunity. The Babylonian exile was only another step in the

divine discipline of history. On the vast alluvial plains of Babylonia the political ideals of Israel might lie buried as in a sepulchre ; but out of that valley of dry bones the divine breath would yet bring a living and purified remnant (Ezek. xxxvii. 1-14) : and when they came to stand once more within the gates of Jerusalem, they would serve the God of Israel according to the original intention—as a religious community whose whole life was summed up in the service of the sanctuary. Such was the people of Jehovah in the times of the second Temple. The high priest who was the head of the national worship, was also the head of the entire national life ; and “this can only mean that the nation is one which has been deprived of its civil autonomy, that it no longer enjoys political existence, but survives merely as a Church.” *

2. THE RISE OF ASSYRIA.—We may begin with a brief reference to the *Syrian Wars*, which lasted all through the dynasties of Omri and Jehu (880-800 B.C.). From the day that Elisha beheld, with tear-dimmed vision, the savage treatment of Israel by Hazael and Benhadad (2 Kings viii. 12), the kingdom of Damascus had oppressed the kingdom of Samaria with such vindictive cruelty, that the tribes of Israel had been reduced to the lowest extremity—trodden under instruments of iron, “like the dust by thrashing” (xiii. 7). But at length, in the closing years of the ninth century, the tide began to turn in Israel’s favour. Jehoash recovered from Syria the cities which his father had lost (ver. 25), and Jeroboam II. not only restored the border

* Wellhausen, Art. “Pentateuch.”—*Ency. Brit.*

of Israel to its old limits (xiv. 25), but even re-established the authority of Israel over Damascus itself (ver. 28). In Amos's graphic language, a fire had been kindled in the realm of Hazael, and had begun to consume the palaces of Benhadad ; and the Kingdom of Damascus, the rival and oppressor of the house of Jehu, ceased to be a controlling power in the affairs of the West-land. The explanation of this change in Asiatic politics must be sought further east in the rising power of Assyria.

1. *The Early Assyrian Empire.*

The history of the first Assyrian empire may be traced back as far as 1500 B.C. A Kasshite invasion from the mountains of Elam had overthrown the old Babylonian kingdom ; and the priestly rulers of Asshur, who were originally a colony from Babylonia, immediately asserted their independence, and founded the empire of Assyria, near the confluence of the Tigris and Lower Zab. It was a cradle-land in every way worthy of so energetic and warlike a race. The fertility of the soil, enriched by the numerous streams which issue from the spurs of the Kurdistan mountains, and the proximity of the wild hill tribes, who were ever ready to swoop down and prey upon the fatness of the valleys, afforded them the means and necessary stimulus for their development as a nation, and fitted them for their two great trades—commerce and war. Compared with the older Babylonians, who occupied the lower lands of the Euphrates, the Assyrians were neither peace-loving nor literary, but masterful and aggressive ; and absolutely remorseless, like the later

Romans, in the energy with which they gratified their love of power. The inscription of Ramman-nirari I. (1320 B.C.) was really typical of the entire Assyrian policy—he was “the destroyer of all enemies above and below,” and “the sweeper away of armies.” Such was the nation which dominated the affairs of Western Asia for well-nigh a thousand years.

One feature of the early history of Assyria ought specially to be noted. It consisted largely of great periods of military activity, alternating with long intervals of exhaustion and decline. Tiglath-pileser I., *e.g.*, who was one of the greatest conquerors of the ancient world (1120-1100), carried the Assyrian arms as far west as the northern parts of Phœnicia. He even sailed upon the Mediterranean Sea, and killed a dolphin in its waters. But after his death, the dynasty was exhausted, and for almost two hundred years the Assyrian empire passed under eclipse. It was during this period that David was able to extend his kingdom to the ideal limits of the Hebrew state—no other power being found to oppose his conquests throughout the Oriental world. It is a somewhat similar period of Assyrian activity, and subsequent exhaustion, that explains the crippling of Damascus, and the brilliant expansion of Israel during the opening years of Jeroboam II. The kingdom of Hazael had no strength to spare for the aggressive policy of the kings of Israel. It was fighting for dear life in trying to roll back the forces of Shalmaneser II. and Ramman-nirari III., who were again seeking, as the vicegerents of Asshur, to bring all the riches of the West-land into Assyrian

channels. Damascus itself, after a prolonged series of attacks, succumbed in 797 B.C., and as Jeroboam II. ascended the throne of Israel but a few years later, it is obvious that there was little strength left to oppose his campaign, when, in the lull that succeeded the storm, he extended the border of Israel "from the entering in of Hamath to the sea of the Arabah." Not even the forces of Assyria were a serious menace to his prosperity, for after the death of Ramman-nirari, it again declined into comparative inactivity, from which it was only aroused—but not until the close of Jeroboam's long reign—by the founding of the second Assyrian empire, under Tiglath-pileser III. (745 B.C.).

2. *The Leading Principle of the Second Empire.*

The main defect in the first Assyrian empire, as seen in the alternating periods of activity and decline, lay in its lack of cohesion and permanence. So long as it enjoyed the creative genius and dominating personality of some great conqueror, its armies swept out in all directions to subjugate and impoverish the nations; but the moment the conqueror died, the huge fabric he had raised crumbled to pieces, and the whole conquest had to be repeated a second time whenever a successor worthy of the nation's ideal was seated upon the throne. Even under the second empire, which lasted from the accession of Tiglath-pileser III. to the fall of Nineveh in 606 B.C., this fatal defect in the body politic was not wholly eliminated. Sargon, the general of the army, who succeeded Salmaneser IV. in 722, found, no less than his predecessors,

that the vast empire of Assyria had, in great measure, to be reconquered ; for the subject provinces, the moment they heard of the great king's death, had been quick to raise the standard of revolt, and to cast off their allegiance.

But while this defect remained and ultimately proved the cause of Nineveh's downfall, it had been the ambition of Tiglath-pileser III. and his successors to minimise, if not destroy, its deteriorating influence. They adopted the drastic measure of transporting the conquered populations to some other part of the empire, and planting Assyrian colonies and garrisons in their place. From one point of view nothing could be more tragic or pathetic than the agony of such a removal. A nation's ideals and even a nation's gods are inseparably bound up with the land where they have been born and bred : and to think of them being banished as captives to the hated land of the conqueror is a depth of humiliation not easily surpassed in its gloom. But from the wider standpoint of universal history there may have been redeeming features even in deportation. As wrought out among the smaller states of Western Asia, it unquestionably prepared the way for better things to come. Prior to the advent of this Assyrian policy, these smaller communities were ever engaged in internecine strife, and aggravating instead of quenching the implacable feuds of their forefathers : but after the greater part of their inhabitants had been removed by this drastic treatment of Assyria, they began to learn, as never before, the lesson of human brotherhood and the value of co-operation and mutual

goodwill in the working out of a common destiny. In this way the exclusive party spirit and narrow limits of the tribe broke down before the invasion of the second Assyrian empire; and the type of universal supremacy exhibited by Tiglath-pileser paved the way for the more perfect empires of the future, the last of which was to be the vehicle for the world-wide diffusion of the evangel of peace.

3. *The Fall of Samaria, and the attitude of the Prophets.*

What all this meant for the little kingdoms west of the Jordan was speedily brought to light in the siege and fall of Samaria (722). Encouraged by the hope of Egyptian aid, Hoshea and other princes of Syria and Palestine had broken with Assyria shortly after the death of Tiglath-pileser. But Shalmaneser IV. lost no time in coming to stamp out the defection. In 724 he appeared in the West-land; and as the unhappy King of Israel had been disappointed in the hopes he set on Egypt, he was compelled to face the dread Assyrian alone. The site of the city was practically impregnable to the methods of ancient warfare, for neither belfries nor battering-rams could play upon its walls. But what can resist the slow advance of the famine? For three long years the process of starving it into surrender was leisurely resorted to, and the hour when Samaria would become a "plantation for vineyards," was simply a question of time. But before that hour arrived, Shalmaneser sickened and died; and the task was left to his more fortunate and renowned successor, Sargon, who captured the

city and deported the population—the upper classes to the number of 27,280 persons, who were responsible for the rebellion, being carried away into captivity.

And what of the attitude of the prophets? Were they overwhelmed and dismayed by the downfall of the state? No, the things for which the prophets contended were of far more value than the national existence of any people: and they lived to proclaim the fulness of the divine mercy, which, like the rainbow in nature, irradiates with heavenly light the dark storm clouds of the exile. If Israel departed from Jehovah in unbelief and disobedience, Israel, alas, must suffer; for Jehovah is the God of righteousness, and righteousness is that for the sake of which all other things exist. But if Israel repented and sought His favour, even in that far-off land, He would remember the oath which He swore unto their fathers, and compass them about with songs of deliverance. For—and this is the great truth which the Assyrian invasion had taught them—Jehovah is the God of Assyria no less than the God of Israel. He brought the Philistines from Caphtor, and the Syrians from Kir, no less than the children of Israel from the land of Egypt (Amos ix. 7): and He was controlling the destiny of even the Assyrian empire, and making it the instrument of His purpose (Isa. x. 5 *ff.*). So that both by the conquests of Asshur and the discipline of Israel, He was gradually elaborating the fulness of His plan, and bringing the world one battle-field nearer to the great consummation.

3. HEBREW PROPHECY.—Prophecy itself is

the sign and seal of the Covenant. Whether we regard it as a token of the divine faithfulness, or a vehicle of Old Testament revelation, or a moral witness against sin, the Covenant relation between God and man has made prophecy a necessity. God is faithful to the Covenant. He is the Father of lights with whom is no variation nor the shadow cast by turning ; and therefore He does not withhold from His chosen people the spiritual guidance they need for the perfect exercise of their calling. He raises up from among themselves a long series of prophets to be the pilots of their history and the pioneers of their faith (Jer. vii. 25). He remembers the oath which He swore unto their fathers, and thus prophecy becomes the sequel to the Covenant.

I. *The Prophetical Order.*

The prophecy of Amos is the earliest prophetical *writing* of which we can speak with any certainty (eighth century B.C.). But this does not mean that Amos himself is the originator of Old Testament prophecy. It is the conviction of all the sacred writers, that the line of prophetical teachers may be traced back to the age and activity of Moses (Amos ii. 10-11., Hosea xii. 13, Jer. vii. 25). Not to dwell on a succession of men like Nathan, Gad, Iddo, etc., who are expressly described as prophets or seers, we have the prophetical guilds, or "Sons of the Prophets," in the times of Elijah and Elisha (2 Kings ii. 15), an association which shows that a full century before the call of Amos, the fostering of spiritual life, and probably the training of young men as religious teachers, had been greatly extended

throughout the northern kingdom, and had well-nigh assumed the proportions of a national institution. Two centuries earlier, in the days of Samuel, we find large bands or companies of prophets gathering around Samuel himself, who probably desired at the close of that lawless age to found a home for the newly-kindled religious life of the nation (1 Sam. xix. 20). But not even in these guilds do we find the beginning of the prophetic order. A prophet is incidentally mentioned in Judges vi. 8; and still earlier, we have the illustrious example of the prophetess Deborah. "The Song of Deborah rises like a broken arch amid ruins pointing we perceive not whither, but across a gulf of wreck and confusion, another arch rises in the prophetic period in line with the former and pointing backwards. Is it unreasonable to conclude that they form the remains of what was once a continuous structure?" *

The answer given by the eighth century prophets is clear and decisive. "By a prophet the Lord brought Israel up out of Egypt, and by a prophet was he preserved" (Hos. xii. 13). The continuous structure goes back all the way to the Exodus. It leads to the towering personality of him who said, "The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a prophet like unto me" (Deut. xviii. 15).

The prophet, then, is primarily one of a class. He is the heir of all the ages that have preceded him. The God whom he declares to his own generation is the God of his fathers, the same God, declaring His character and will in applica-

* Robertson, "The Early Religion of Israel," p. 119.

tion to new circumstances. So it was with Elijah ; and so is it with Amos or any other prophet who speaks in the name of the Lord. "We cannot account for the appearance of a succession of such men otherwise than on the supposition that they arose out of a society in the main like-minded with themselves, and fitted to give them birth—that they were the efflorescence season after season of a tree whose roots always stood in the soil." *

2. *The Prophetical Call.*

The prophets may be the efflorescence of a tree that always stood in the soil, but both the tree and the efflorescence have themselves to be accounted for. The power that plants the tree at the first is not the tree itself, and the vernal breath of spring that woos the buds into blossom is not to be confounded with the petal blooms that are breathed into being by its power. Both are needed—the living sap of the tree which is the life-blood of the branches, and the welcome voice of spring that summons it to rise and effloresce. And the call of Jehovah, no less than the fitness of man, is needed for the vocation of a prophet. The human gifts are not ignored, but they must be enlarged, perfected and crowned by a spiritual endowment.

The imperative nature of this call is already seen in the case of Moses. The Lord appeared to him at the sanctuary of the burning bush, and said, "Come now, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh" (Ex. iii. 10). But the solitude of the desert has

* A. B. Davidson, *Expositor*, March 1887.

left a deep impression on this young Hebrew. He has been led to measure himself amid the silences of nature, and the result has not been to add to the complacency of his former self-confidence. He would fain have hung back from the greatness of the undertaking, and have allowed another to go in his stead (Ex. iv. 10, *cf.* Jer. i. 6, Isa. vi. 5). But there is no setting aside the definite command of Jehovah. "The Lord hath spoken, who can but prophesy?" "Who hath made man's mouth . . . is it not I the Lord? I will be with thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shalt speak."

The psychological condition of the prophet when he receives this call is not easily defined. Revelation is a spiritual process of which we know and can know, little or nothing. It is an inspiration of the soul which we can neither detect nor measure. "Thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh nor whither it goeth." It is a much simpler matter to say what the prophetic state is not than to specify what it is. We cannot accept, *e.g.* the notion of Philo that the prophets received their revelations in a condition of ecstasy or trance—a state in which the self-consciousness was held in abeyance, and the human soul, like an unsullied mirror, was fitted to receive impressions of divine truth. No doubt cases do occur in Scripture where the individual life is subjugated by the power of the divine spirit (*cf.* Ezek. i. 28, Dan. viii. 17, Rev. i. 17); but it does not follow that these abnormal conditions are coincident with the state of prophetic revelation. The paralysing sense of

the supernatural is not meant to be permanent. It is simply the necessary preparation for the subsequent reception of the truth. The moment the human soul is emptied of self, and kneels abashed in the presence of the Eternal, the command comes to it, as it came to Job, Ezekiel and John, "Arise, stand upon thy feet, and I will speak with thee." Instead of absolute passivity, as in a trance, there is every evidence of the highest mental and spiritual energy. The prophets stand up with complete consciousness, and perfect recollectedness to receive the divine word.*

3. *The Prophetical Calling.*

The prophets, one and all, stand in an intimate relation to the history of their own times. Whatever bearing their messages may have upon the remote future, they are, first and foremost, the statesmen, preachers and guides of their own age. They are both patriots and preachers ; but they are also something more. They are the inspired organs of divine revelation. They are the heralds of *new* truth. They are the interpreters of ever higher stages in the unveiling of the divine purpose—and their higher tasks demanded a higher spiritual endowment—a divine afflatus that enabled them to declare God's will with a directness and authority which we cannot claim. The genuine prophet is the Lord's exegete and mouthpiece ; for it is his to come forth from the audience-chamber of Jehovah,

* Cf. Num. xii. 6-8, where the communication of spiritual truth in plain words is placed far above dreams or visions as a method of revelation.

and say with respect to any new circumstances that may have arisen, "Thus saith the Lord." "Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but He revealeth His secret unto His servants the prophets" (Amos iii. 7).

The message they bear is not always a light thing to carry. It is often weighted with warning and doom. It is a heavy *burden* pressing upon the soul (Mal. i. 1), a fire shut up in the bones (Jer. xx. 9), fermenting wine in new wine-skins (Job xxxii. 18-19), and willingly would the messenger be relieved from the hardness and thanklessness of his task. But the true prophet dare not be a preacher of smooth things. This, in Old Testament times, is the mark of a false prophet (Jer. vi. 13-14)—the mark of men whose one desire is to stand well with the people, and whose one object is to secure an easy and luxurious life. But the true prophet of God has a very different mission. He never proclaims unconditional happiness and salvation. He always conditions these on moral and spiritual reformation—a rending of the hearts and not the garments—a whole-hearted return unto the Lord their God (Hos. xiv. 1). And such men are the eyes of the nation and the pillars of the State even yet. We all feel the safer by so much as we know that there are amongst us men who will lift up a testimony in the name of righteousness though there be none to cheer them with one word of encouragement. These, in any age, are the watchmen, whom God has set on the city walls, and God Himself will reward them.

CHAPTER II.

THE PRE-EXILIC PROPHETS.

4. THE PROPHET AMOS.—With the name of Amos we enter the domain of fully verified history. The detailed heading in i. 1 may not have been from the author's pen, but in vii. 10 we are distinctly told that he delivered his message in the reign of Jeroboam II. This monarch, according to the Assyrian chronology, ruled over Israel from about 783 to 743, so that we may accept the year 760 as an approximate date for the peasant-prophet of Tekoa. He was a man in every way worthy of his high vocation. Before his day the old kingdom of Israel was tottering to its fall. The glamour of foreign alliances and the seductions of Baal-worship had eaten like a canker into the life of the nation; and so deep-seated had the evil become that both Church and State were in danger of falling into irreparable ruin. But, as pointed out in Section 1, Jehovah had something better in store for Israel than this. He had the ministry of the prophets. He would raise up a new series of patriotic statesmen to conserve the glory of Israel's spiritual ideal. And, therefore, amid the storm-clouds that were gathering around the nation, He sent those preachers

of righteousness to build up another Israel on the ruins of the old kingdom. And "the founder of this new type of prophecy is Amos, the herdman of Tekoa." *

1. *The Man.*

He appears before Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, and protests, saying, "I was no prophet, neither was I one of the sons of the prophets" (vii. 14). But this strong language does not mean that for the fulfilment of his task he is entirely independent of the past. His own prophecy with its accurate knowledge of previous history, both Israelitish and foreign, is conclusive proof to the contrary (*cf.* chaps. i., ii. 9-10; vi. 5; ix. 7). "There is nothing provincial about our prophet: his vision embraces all the nations with whom the Hebrews had any converse: he knows their history and geography with surprising exactness, and is, in fact our only source for several particulars of great value to the historian of Semitic antiquity." † He has not been trained in the so-called schools of the prophets; but the silence of nature, the long leisure of life, and the loneliness of the fields dipping at times into the seclusion of the desert have been no unworthy school for the training of the faculty divine, a very nursery of heaven for the cultivation of a deep, spiritual discernment. So that while Amos is only a herdman following the flocks in Tekoa, and a cultivator of the sycamore fig, he is nevertheless deeply studied both in religion and history, and is well

* Robertson Smith, "Prophets of Israel," new ed., p. 120.

† "Prophets of Israel," p. 127.

fitted to become a polished shaft in the quiver of the Eternal.

His upbringing at Tekoa, which lay about twelve miles S.E. from Jerusalem, on the edge of the desert, explains one of the most pleasing features of his prophecy. It is shot through and illumined by the sights and sounds of the country. It is breathing with the fragrance of rural life. Does he think of Jehovah as being grieved and burdened by the thought of Israel's sin? He likens it to a waggon loaded with sheaves. "Behold I am pressed under you as a cart is pressed that is full of sheaves" (ii. 13, R.V. margin). Or does he wish to give them some idea of the doom that will come upon them because of that sin? He compares it to a shepherd trying to rescue a lamb from the teeth of the lion: he only rescues "two legs, or a piece of an ear" (iii. 12). Or finally, does he long to impart the assurance that in the general overthrow of the wicked, the faithful remnant will nevertheless be kept unharmed? He turns to the familiar emblem of the winnowing sieve and exclaims, "I will sift the house of Israel among all nations like as corn is sifted in a sieve, yet shall not the least grain fall upon the earth" (ix. 9). The roar of the lion (iii. 4); snares set for birds (ver. 5); blasting and mildew (iv. 9); the locusts devouring the aftermath (vii. 1); ploughing and reaping (ix. 13); baskets of summer fruit (viii. 1); Pleiades and Orion (v. 8)—these supply the imagery in which this shepherd and husbandman has clothed the spirituality of his teaching. Ask Isaiah, the greatest man in Jerusalem, to describe his call, and he clothes it in the

imagery of the temple (ch. vi.). But ask Amos, the peasant-prophet, to describe his, and how different is the metaphor. "The lion hath roared, who will not fear? The Lord God hath spoken who can but prophesy?" It is the same divine truth which is uttered by both prophets, but each is allowed to express it in his own way.

2. *His Time.*

The reign of Jeroboam was one of great prosperity in both kingdoms. He was able to do what none of his immediate predecessors had done, extend his boundaries to well-nigh the original limits of the kingdom under David and Solomon. The prophecy of Jonah was fulfilled to the letter : he re-established the authority of Israel even over Damascus (2 Kings xiv. 28). As suggested in section 2, the Syrians had enough to do to withstand a far mightier foe—the growing power of Assyria which was yet to come all the way to Israel herself, and sift her as corn in a sieve. But that time was not yet. It was Syria's turn just now, and thus Jeroboam got the opportunity of extending his dominions.

Alas, the very brilliance of his success but added fresh fuel to the flame that was licking up the life-blood of the nation. Prosperity and luxury were followed by moral deterioration. It is a terrible picture the prophet draws especially of the ruling classes. They displayed great extravagance. They had their winter and summer residences which were built of hewn stone, panelled with ivory, and furnished with couches inlaid with the same costly

material ; and there they feasted and drank to excess amid delicate perfumes and soft strains of delicious music (vi. 4-6). And how was all this kept up ? By what Amos bluntly calls violence and robbery—oppression of the poor, dishonest trading, false weights, and worthless goods. They bought the poor for silver, and the needy for a pair of shoes, and sold the refuse of the wheat (viii. 4-6). And yet alongside of this unrighteousness and self-indulgence, they were great sticklers for the observance of prescribed rites and ceremonies. They prided themselves on being the people of Jehovah, and were confident that even though the day of the Lord should come, it would bring nothing but good to them. But “woe unto you that desire the day of the Lord ! Shall not the day of the Lord be darkness and not light ? even very dark and no brightness in it ?” (v. 18-20). Little marvel a day of awakening was nigh at hand ; and Amos is the man sent to announce it.

Up from Tekoa he comes ; and like Elijah before Ahab, he presents himself at Bethel at the very centre of all this magnificence and false worship, and flings around him his burning words of denunciation. This is the meaning of his visions—the plague of locusts (vii. 1-3), the devouring fire (vv. 4-6), the plumbline (vv. 7-9), the basket of summer fruit (viii. 1-2), and the smiting and shaking of the Temple, which falls on the heads of the worshippers assembled below (ix. 1). All these are framed to drive home the words of solemn doom—“The high places of Isaac shall be desolate, and the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste ; and I will rise against

the house of Jeroboam with the sword" (vii. 9). Amaziah the priest could scarcely believe his ears. He at once sent and informed Jeroboam of the prophet's sacrilege and treason. But Jeroboam does not seem to have taken any action in the matter. At any rate, instead of persecuting or slaying the fearless Amos, Amaziah had to content himself with exhorting him to flee away to his own land, and there earn his bread, and not come with his unwelcome strictures to the chapel or court of a king (vii. 13). And in all probability Amos obeyed. He retired to the uplands of Tekoa; and there beside his dwarf breed of sheep, and stunted sycamores, he composed and finished the prophecies that here compose his book. His special work was accomplished, and therefore he went back to his ordinary calling.

3. *His Message.*

What was the nature of the message which caused such a flutter in the sanctuary at Bethel? Like Paul's key-word, it may be summed up in the one term, *righteousness*. "Let judgment roll down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream" (v. 24). Nothing more, and nothing less. "Morality is that for the sake of which all other things exist: it is the alone essential thing in the world." Apart from this, even their sacrifices were an abomination. Their worship in which they trusted was simply a multiplying of transgression. "Come to Bethel and transgress!" he exclaims in irony, "to Gilgal and multiply transgression: and bring your sacrifices every morning, and your tithes every three

days" (iv. 4. R.V.); but know this that "Gilgal shall surely go into captivity, and Bethel shall come to nought" (v. 5). Such worship is not worship. The only true worship is to seek the Lord your God. "Seek ye me, and ye shall live." But if not, then this solemn doom, Israel will be sifted among all nations as corn is sifted in a sieve (ix. 2-4). It may be granted that all this would be but so much stage-thunder, unless there be something behind it, able to drive the threatening home. And in the case before us there *is* something behind it. For under a concluding paragraph we have Amos's theology. Jehovah is not merely the God of Righteousness: He is also *the Lord of Hosts*. He is the God of celestial as well as of earthly legions (v. 27, etc.), and this implies omnipotence. He is the One which is and which was and which is to come, the Almighty. Has any one power to contend with Him? No, He rules nations as well as men. He moves them upon the face of the earth, "like pawns upon a board,"* bringing Israel from Egypt, the Philistines from Caphtor, and the Syrians from Kir (ix. 7). So that it is the dictate of wisdom to lay down the arms of rebellion, to turn to Him and live, to live righteously, and then rest in the glorious promise with which Amos concludes—that to all the faithful the day of the Lord will mean redemption, the Davidic house will be set up more securely, and the whole earth, "the remnant of the nations," be blessed in the coming glory (ix. 11-15).

5. THE PROPHET HOSEA.—The name Hosea,

* A. B. Davidson, *Expositor*, March 1887.

which signifies the "Salvation of Jehovah," is simply another form of Hoshea, the last King of Israel, or of Joshua, the successor of Moses (Deut. xxxii. 44). Like Amos, he prophesied in the closing years of Jeroboam II., but also throughout the dark days which followed, when no fewer than three kings were cut off—*i.e.*, Jeroboam himself, his son Zechariah, who reigned but six months, and Shallum, his murderer, who reigned but four weeks. These were followed by Menahem, the cruel adventurer, whose rule lasted, at least, for ten years; but who kept his seat on the throne of Israel by becoming a vassal to Assyria (2 Kings xv. 8-22). The prophecy of Hosea, in its divisions and contents, reflects the features of this chequered history. It consists of two main sections. (1) Chaps. i.-iii., which regard the house of Jehu as still standing (i. 4), and assume, in their allusions to the corn, wine, and oil, the prosperous days of Jeroboam II. (ii. 8-9). (2) Chaps. iv.-xiv., which contain clear indications of the anarchy and misrule that characterised the reigns of Jeroboam's successors (vii. 7, x. 15; xiii. 2, etc.). The mention of the sin and folly of Israel in appealing to Assyria for help (v. 13, vii. 11, etc.) points to the reign of Menahem, who purchased the support of Pul, or Tiglath-pileser, by giving him a thousand talents of silver (738). So that the year 745 may be accepted as an approximate date for the prophecy of Hosea, *i.e.*, twelve or fifteen years later than his older contemporary, Amos.

1. *The Man.*

Beyond the mention of his father's name, Beeri

(i. 1), nothing is told us about the prophet's lineage or birthplace. That he was a native of Israel, and even an Ephraimite, is evident from his historical and geographical allusions : though some have supposed that he had his permanent residence in Judah, and retired there, like the prophet from Tekoa, after his thankless task had been accomplished. These two prophets to the northern kingdom had indeed a great deal in common ; and yet they were very different men—the one a shepherd on the edge of the desert, and his home-life never mentioned at all ; the other finding that the sad tragedy of his home was for him the key to everything.

From this point of view, the first three chapters of his prophecy are not easily understood, but the following seems to be the most feasible explanation. Hosea had married a woman called Gomer, in good faith ; but from the first her heart was set on the unnameable idolatries of Baal-worship. For a few years they probably lived happily enough, and during this time three children were born in lawful wedlock ; but soon after, the dark cloud fell. She left her home for the lewd practices of the heathen, and by-and-bye sank so low that she was reduced to slavery.

“The adulterer's love, grown weary, turned to hate,
And dragging her, once fondled and caressed,
As men may drag a slave they take in war,
Before the men who gather in the gate,
He offered her for money.”*

* See Plumptre's beautiful poem “Gomer” in *Lazarus, and other Poems* : where, however, a different explanation is adopted.

Her husband, however, had not forgotten her. He loved her still. And having paid the ransom, half in money, half in kind (iii. 2), he brought her back to her old home. And then what happened? One would have thought there was nothing more to tell—that such an experience was evil, and evil only. Yet it was not so. Jehovah came to the prophet and said : Let us lift this sad story of your home life to the highest possible level. It is but a faint illustration of what I have had to endure at the hand of Israel. You, of all men, ought to be able to understand the pathos, if not the agony, of this side of revelation. I, too, espoused a wife in good faith, even My people Israel ; but they rebelled against Me. They bowed the knee at the shrine of Moloch, and joined in dance to Baal and Ashtoreth. But I also would fain win them back. I would allure them and bring them into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto them. I would give them the valley of Achor for a door of hope (ii. 14-15). Go thou to Israel, My backsliding people, and say : “O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God, for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity” (xiv. 1).

Hosea, left to his own reflections, was able to do more than understand this side of divine revelation : he found in it a well of comfort for his own wounded life. The path he had travelled these many years had been a hard discipline ; but evidently it had been all needed if ever he was to appreciate the love of God for Israel. Seeing it to be necessary, and realising now the good that had ultimately sprung from it, he was not so crushed as formerly at the thought that the bitter trial had had to be encountered. God had

brought good out of the evil. He had made Hosea's pain to work out his spiritual advancement, and to reflect the divine glory. And thus the prophet could well believe that he had been under divine leading all the time. He did not realise it at the first, but now he hoped he understood it better, and felt it more. Through all the mystery of his years, a divine purpose had been running. It was God's voice that said, "Go, and marry Gomer."

2. *His Teaching.*

As contrasted with Amos, the preacher of civil righteousness, Hosea is the prophet of forgiving and redeeming love—*loving-kindness*. His entire message must be interpreted in the light of that truth. Let us note some of his conceptions. (1) The thought of a *Covenant*: "They, like Adam, have transgressed the covenant: there have they dealt treacherously against Me" (vi. 7). Jehovah had entered into a covenant with Israel—a mutual relationship in which the divine election of love was to be responded to by the human obligation of law (Ex. xxiv. 7).^{*} In Hosea's language, it was as the bond of a marriage-contract. The closest of all human ties was taken to express the fulness of God's love for His people. In his own way, the prophet might have said, "This is a great mystery; but I speak concerning Christ and the Church" (Eph. v. 32). But however tender the relationship may be, there is another which is no less expressive, viz.: the thought of sonship. "When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called My Son out of

^{*} See the writer's *Mosaic Tabernacle*, pp. 96, 97.

Egypt" (xi. 1). This meant a connection of filial love, which would show itself in obedience. For among the Semites, the grown-up son performed the same menial offices as the slave of the house. Compare the language of the elder brother in the parable: "Lo, these many years do I *serve* thee" (Luke xv. 29). Both as Jehovah's spouse, and Jehovah's son, Israel was pledged to a life of fidelity and affection.

But (2), we have the thought of Israel's *sin and punishment*. Israel was unfaithful to the marriage-bond: she was guilty of spiritual apostasy. She turned away to other lovers — *e.g.*, Egypt and Assyria (vii. 11); and even to other gods, as Baal and Ashtoreth (ii. 13). It was these, she said, and not Jehovah, who gave her her corn, wine and oil, and therefore the sore discipline of exile would be her portion (ix. 17).

"And thou, O Israel, thou must bear thy doom,
Grow old and fail, in homes that are not thine,
Where mighty rivers water lands unknown,
And Asshur's palaces, in pride of strength,
Rise high upon the banks of Hiddekel." *

And yet Israel's husband and father yearned over her with a great love. "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? how shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim? mine heart is turned within me; my compassions are kindled together" (xi. 8). And thus punishment, though necessary, would be His strange work; it would be chastisement, the proof of His love.

* Plumptre.

And, therefore (3), we have the *promise of restoration*. See especially chaps. v. 15, vi. 1-3, and the whole of chap. xiv. It is impossible to read these passages and not feel that Hosea goes a great deal deeper than Amos. He began deeper—not with the righteousness of conduct, but with the love of the heart. “He pierces beneath the visible conduct of the nation to the disposition that underlies it. . . . Amos judges the moral offence of Israel as breaches of universal law, aggravated by the possession of special privileges. Hosea judges them as proofs of a heart not true to Jehovah, out of sympathy with His character, and ungrateful to His love.” * And the nature of the sin determines the character of the restoration. It must be based in a radical change of heart—a following on to know the Lord (vi. 3). Or, to take our other figure, it is like the return of the Prodigal Son. “In Thee the fatherless findeth mercy” (xiv. 3). So that we have a distinct foreshadowing of the great New Testament doctrine of the *Divine Fatherhood*—not, it may be, in the familiar language of “put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet,” but in language no less beautiful in its imagery. “I will be as the dew unto Israel. . . . They shall revive as the corn, and blossom as the vine; the scent thereof shall be as the wine of Lebanon.”

“And then thou too shalt, after many days,
Turn in thine anguish to the Eternal Lord,
And, wearied out with evil, seeking peace,
Dwell in His Goodness everlastingly.” †

* “Prophets of Israel,” p. 164.

† Plumptre.

All through, it is a prophecy throbbing with passion—beating with the pulses of a divine and human love—and yet it closes with a counsel of prosaic soberness, the dictate of thoughtful common sense. Whoso is wise and prudent, let him beware lest he stumble in the paths of righteousness ; for if he stumble in these, what shall be his fate in the paths of wickedness !

6. THE PROPHET MICAH.—With the name of Micah, and his greater contemporary Isaiah, the centre of interest is shifted from Samaria to Jerusalem. We leave the history of the Ten Tribes for the subsequent fortunes of Judah.

1. *His Time and Training.*

The northern state had not yet fallen when these two prophets began to prophesy (*cf.* Isa. xxviii. 1-4, Micah i. 6). Isaiah was called in the year that King Uzziah died (740) ; and Micah exercised his prophetic gifts as early as the reign of Jotham, his successor ; and all this was several years prior to the fall of Samaria (722). But while they began their ministry in the years preceding that catastrophe, they both lived long enough after the blow had fallen, to point the moral of Israel's fate on behalf of Judah and Jerusalem ; until having done their best work in the reign of Hezekiah (711), they probably closed their ministerial labours in the dark days of Manasseh (695).

The state of affairs in Judah was much the same as in Samaria. The ruling classes in Jerusalem were swallowed up of wine, and had gone astray through strong drink, no less than the drunkards of

Ephraim.* Indeed, the same moral causes were operative in both kingdoms. Prosperity followed by social corruption had vitiated the reign of Uzziah no less than the reign of Jeroboam II. The subjugation of Edom had brought a large increase of wealth to the Judean kings (2 Kings xiv. 7, 22). It enabled them to get possession of the harbour of Elath on the Red Sea, as also the lucrative caravan route from Petra to southern Arabia: and this meant a great expansion in the commerce of the country, with all the grave social perils that such an expansion brings. Even in the promising reign of Hezekiah, the evils which Amos and Hosea had attacked in the northern kingdom were equally prevalent in the southern; and men of God, like Isaiah and Micah had to lift up their voice against them.

In origin and training Micah was a very different man from his contemporary Isaiah. Isaiah lived in the capital, and both as statesman and as preacher was easily the first man in Judah. But Micah was a dweller in the country, and, as a representative of the peasant class, came from the village of Moresheth-Gath. This lay on the Shephelah or low hills between Philistia and Judah, about twenty miles south-west of Jerusalem. Compare the geographical references in chap. i. 10-15, where, looking out from his village home, he beholds the destruction which was to fall upon Samaria, sweeping around the borders of the Shephelah and smiting each town and village in its course, until, at last,

* Cf. Isa. xxviii. 7, with ver. 3 where "these also" refers to the inhabitants of Judah.

it reaches the gate of his own people—even to Jerusalem. The entire picture is the description of a man who is dwelling on the confines of Philistia.

But however diverse the two men may be in training and surroundings, they have much in common with respect to their message, and the purpose and scope of their ministry. In Isa. ii. 1-5, and Micah iv. 1-4, we have an older oracle quoted by both. Evidently both statesman and peasant could find their pleasure in reading the same literature. And why not? This is the hope of any nation when a thoughtful and God-fearing peasantry is conversant with the best books in the language. Why should any shepherd or ploughman be content to be ignorant? Peasant though he was the words of Micah were memorable words. According to Jer. xxvi. 16-19, he had a good deal to do with Hezekiah's reformation. About 710, the careless conduct of that king was belying the hopes of an earlier day : and Isaiah was sent to announce the fact that the sickness which had befallen him was to be unto death (2 Kings xx. 1). But on the repentance of Hezekiah the judgment was postponed. Zion was not yet to be ploughed as a field, nor Jerusalem to become heaps ; neither was the mountain of the Lord's house to become as the high places of a forest. Still in circumstances like these, Micah's burning words would be of great value in supporting the cause of his illustrious colleague : and both statesman and peasant had the satisfaction of seeing their words of warning laid to heart.

2. *His Prophecy.*

The book of Micah is naturally divided into three main sections—

(1) *Denunciation and punishment* (chaps. i.-iii).—Like a typical inhabitant of the country, Micah is chiefly grieved at the wickedness and injustice of the cities (i. 5-7). His stern words, however, are mingled with lamentation (ver. 8). The people of Jehovah, like the persecuted son of Jesse, will again become a fugitive, “the glory of Israel shall come even unto Adullam” (ver. 15). And what were the sins that had thus provoked the anger of Jehovah? Injustice and oppression. Like Ahab seizing the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, the magnates of Samaria and Jerusalem coveted fields and seized them, houses and took them away: and they oppressed a man and his house, even a man and his heritage (ii. 1-2). No doubt, the extortion and oppression could in some measure be explained. It was to pay the heavy tribute demanded by Assyria. But the grandees of Jerusalem carried the exactions much further than the necessities of the case required. In scathing language the prophet describes them as fleecing and devouring the sheep which they had been set to guard. “They flay their skin from off them and break their bones, yea they chop them in pieces as for the pot, and as flesh within the caldron” (iii. 2-3). And therefore, the man of God, whether in city or village, had to rebuke them in the name of righteousness (ii. 1). But alas, there were other voices that did not speak for God in the time of Micah.

Beginning at iii. 5, we have the first severe indictment against what are called "the false prophets" (*cf.* Jer. vi. 13-14). He will even write the terrible words of ii. 11: "If a man, walking in wind and falsehood, do lie, saying, I will prophesy unto thee of wine and of strong drink: he shall even be the prophet of this people." It was not so with the true prophet of Jehovah. He came with a very different message: "Truly I am full of power by the spirit of the Lord, and of judgment and of might, to declare unto Jacob his transgression, and to Israel his sin" (iii. 8). That transgression and sin could not be hid: and hence this first part of the prophecy ends with the certainty of divine judgment. Zion would be ploughed as a field; Jerusalem would become heaps; and the mountain of the house (*i.e.* Mount Moriah) would be converted into jungle (iii. 9-12).

(2) *Promises* (chaps. iv.-v.).—This section begins with the older oracle already mentioned; and no more inspiring language was ever written. "They shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree: and none shall make them afraid" (iv. 1-5). True, they might be sifted by Assyria, as corn is sifted in a sieve; but read ver. 12. It is Zion, and not Assyria, which is to be horned with iron and shod with brass; and she will beat in pieces many peoples like sheaves upon the threshing-floor. And, therefore, all the foes of Jerusalem are told in chap. v. that one is to arise, even from Bethlehem-Ephratah, who is to be ruler in Israel, and that under his benign sway all will yet be well with the people of Jehovah. "He shall deliver us from

the Assyrian, when he cometh into our land, and when he treadeth within our border" (ver. 6). It is noteworthy that Micah expected this to take place in the near future—in the Assyrian age: just as the Apostles long after expected Jesus to appear the second time while they were yet alive. Wise men, they applied the inspiration of this hope to the circumstances in which they lived. And so ought we. The One whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting, ought always to be conceived as on the skyline of the nearest hills. Behold the day breaketh! the lofty summits are already bathed in the coming glory!

(3) *The Dark Days of Manasseh* (chaps. vi.-vii.).—These chapters, both in style and in character, present a very different situation from that reflected in chaps. i.-v. But it is not necessary to conclude, with Ewald, that they were the work of another prophet in the reign of Manasseh. Micah himself, like Isaiah, may have lived until that ill-starred period of reaction: and disappointed and soured by the turn affairs had taken, he may have penned, in his old age, this sad controversy with the people of Jehovah. "Oh, my people, what have I done unto thee, and wherein have I wearied thee? testify against me" (vi. 3-5). Surely they would yet repent, and come home to God! and, therefore, words of penitence are put in their lips (vers. 6, 7), and the divine answer added (ver. 8). But the prophet, alas, sees no sign of betterment in Jerusalem. The statutes of Omri are still kept, and all the works of the house of Ahab (ver. 16). And thus the concluding chapter opens with lamentation and

woe. "The godly man is perished out of the earth, and there is none upright among men" (vii. 1-6). Micah can only turn for himself (ver. 7), and then for the people (ver. 14), to Jehovah the God of Israel: and the whole prophecy ends with one of the finest passages concerning the pardoning mercy of God contained in Holy Scripture (vers. 18-20). It is at once the meaning of Micah's name and the burden of his message. "Who is a God like unto Thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He retaineth not His anger for ever, because He delighteth in mercy."

3. *His Theme.*

Micah's message is conveniently summarised in chap. vi. 8: and it is obvious as we read it that he has profited in no slight measure by the teaching of his predecessors. Amos had emphasised righteousness, or "doing justly" as the essence of His teaching: Hosea, the duty of loving-kindness, or the mercy that is kindled in the human breast as a reflection of the divine: and Isaiah, the sublime thought of holiness, or divine majesty, before which man can only walk humbly, and tremble at His Word (Isa. vi. 5, lxvi. 2). And now the prophet of Moresheth-Gath combines all the three. He embraces righteousness, mercy and humility in one supreme requirement. "He hath showed thee, O man, what is good: and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to *do justly*, and to *love mercy*, and to *walk humbly* with thy God."

7. THE PROPHET NAHUM.—Isaiah and Micah,

the last of the eighth century prophets, lived long enough after the fall of Samaria, to point the moral of Israel's fate on behalf of Judah and Jerusalem. They prophesied right on into the opening years of the seventh century, and at last closed their ministry in the dark days of Manasseh. Even as they died, however, they prepared the way for another series of prophets—the seventh century prophets, we may call them—and the first of these was Nahum. He, with his contemporaries, Zephaniah and Habakkuk (and the more illustrious Jeremiah), were raised up to be the counsellors and pilots of the nation in the solemn crisis through which it was then passing. The empire of Assyria was tottering to its fall: and as the New Chaldean empire was preparing to take its place, it required men of God, who were patriots no less than preachers, to guide the Judaic kingdom through the storm.

1. *The burden of Nineveh.*

The world-power which exacted tribute from all the smaller States of Western Asia was Assyria, with its capital at Nineveh. Masterful and ruthless she ruled them with a rod of iron. We sometimes speak of the barbarities of modern warfare, and heaven forbid that anyone should seek to make little of its horrors. But modern warfare is kindness itself when compared with the savage cruelties of a Sargon or a Sennacherib. Imagine the fiendish device of flaying men alive! or the inhuman practice of putting out a captive's eyes! or dragging away a batch of exiles with a hook in their nose! "How deeply seated was their thirst for blood and ven-

geance on an enemy is exemplified in a bas-relief which represents Assur-bani-pal and his queen feasting in their garden while the head of a conquered Elamite king hangs from a tree above.* Taking the lion as their favourite emblem, they counted it their greatest glory to lash the nations in their fury. Or in Nahum's graphic language, "The lion did tear in pieces enough for his whelps, and strangled for his lionesses, and filled his caves with prey, and his dens with ravin" (ii. 12). The spirit of Nineveh was simply the spirit of the beast: she was "the bloody city" (iii. 1).

True, the prophets of Israel frequently warn God's people that, however barbarous Assyria might be, it was just this terrible scourge that Jehovah would use for punishing and purifying His sinful nation. He had allowed the Assyrian hosts to come in once already and carry away captive the Ten Tribes: and so far as Isaiah or Micah could see, they might be allowed to come a second time, and do the same to Jerusalem. And yet, that is but one side of the shield. The other is, that if Assyria or any other agent carry the punishment too far—if she violate every instinct of humanity in the ruthlessness of her conquest, then Assyria herself shall be punished. The smiter shall herself be smitten; and when her doom falls, no one shall bewail her. Nay, instead of lamentation, there will be rejoicing. "All that hear the report of thee, clap their hands over thee; for upon whom did not thy wickedness pass continually?" (Nahum iii. 19). This is the aspect of truth that Nahum is

* Sayce, "Assyria; its Princes Priests and People," p. 128.

raised up to enforce. His whole prophecy is but an ancient rendering of the sentiment—

“Rome shall perish ; write that word
In the blood that she has spilt :
Perish, hopeless and abhorred,
Deep in ruin as in guilt.”

Nineveh fell in the closing years of the seventh century. She began to break up after the death of Assur-bani-pal in 626. Babylon in the south was the first to re-assert her independence ; but chiefly, in the east, we have the rising power of the Medes. For a while, the old lion was able to defend himself : and in the first clash of arms the Median king was slain. But by and by the struggle was renewed, and in 606, under King Cyaxares, the Medes carried the city by storm.

2. *The Prophet.*

Of Nahum himself we know next to nothing. He is called the Elkoshite, or inhabitant of Elkosh ; but where this village was is altogether uncertain. There are no fewer than three places that claim to be the birth-place of the prophet—(a) Alkush, a considerable village on the left bank of the Tigris, about two days' journey north of Nineveh, where a building is still shown called the tomb of Nahum ; (b) A village in Galilee, the ruins of which were seen by Jerome ; and (c) a place in the south-west of Judea, not far from Lachish. It seems precarious to find in the name Capernaum (*i.e.* Kephrah Nahum, village of Nahum) an allusion to the Galilean tradition ; for in John vii. 52, the possi-

bility of such a connection is scouted with disdain. "Search, and see that out of Galilee ariseth no prophet." The reference to Judah is even more uncertain, being limited to a rather obscure passage in the works of Epiphanius, a bishop of Cyprus in A.D. 367.

The chief point of interest with respect to Alkush in Assyria, is to determine whether Nahum was so familiar with Nineveh as to be able to describe, as an eye-witness, the operations carried on against her. There can be little doubt that there is much in the prophecy that seems to bear out this contention. Nineveh and its siege are depicted with such vividness and power, that it is hard to believe that the author was not well acquainted with the city (ii. 3-10). But the same thing might be urged concerning his description of No-amon or Thebes in iii. 8-10, which was captured by Assur-bani-pal in 664. His local knowledge of the Egyptian city seems no less precise: and yet no one has felt the necessity of postulating a village in Egypt as the prophet's birthplace. Besides, if Nahum was a descendant of the ten tribes who were settled on the confluents of the Tigris (2 Kings xvii. 6), it does seem a little strange that he has so little to say about them. It is Judah, and not Samaria that is called upon to keep her feasts and perform her vows; for the wicked one shall no more pass through her (i. 15). No doubt it would be interesting to hear the voice of Nahum sounding across the desert from the banks of the Tigris, and publishing the good tidings of the oppressor's fall: *

* Kirkpatrick, "Doct. of the Prophets," p. 251.

but in view of the conflicting considerations already adduced, there is nothing that can be accepted as conclusive: the prophet's birthplace and permanent residence are quite uncertain.

3. *His Prophecy.*

The contents of his prophecy are briefly these:—
(1) The awfulness of the Avenging God (i. 2-6) who utterly destroys the enemies of His people (vers. 7-15). (2) The siege and fall of Nineveh, which is left a desolate ruin (ii. 1-10): and the prophet's exultation over this ancient den of lions (vers. 11-13). (3) A renewed threat against the bloody city—that mistress of witchcrafts (iii. 1-7), whose fate shall be as swift as that of No-amon (vers. 8-11). No rampart or fortress will avail to save her from the dreaded assault of the invader (vers. 12-15); for like locusts spreading their wings and flying away in the sunshine, her merchants, officials and people shall be scattered upon the mountains, and there will be no healing of her bruise (vers. 16-19).

The nature of Nahum's message is significant enough. He proclaims with no uncertain sound, that no kingdom founded upon brute force can ultimately triumph. It carries within its own structure the secret of its dissolution. It has chosen might instead of right, and violence instead of equity, and it needs no vision of the faculty divine to tell us what shall be the end of such a choice. It shall perish in the flames of its own kindling: and go down to the dust a heap of shapeless mounds.

But how was Nahum so sure of this principle of

moral government? Because his view of life was rooted in his theology. It is a man's theology which determines everything else. Read some of his statements a second time. "The Lord is a jealous God and avengeth . . . and will by no means clear the guilty: the Lord hath his way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet. . . . Who can stand before his indignation? and who can abide in the fierceness of his anger? His fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks are broken asunder by him" (i. 2-6). That is the basis of the prophet's faith, that the rule of right shall ultimately triumph. The God of righteousness is a jealous God, and will by no means clear the guilty: He will make a full end of the place thereof, and will pursue His enemies into darkness. But in contrast with this appalling awfulness, read ver. 7: "The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; and He knoweth them that put their trust in Him." It is the same instructive contrast that is suggested by the prophet's name. It means *consolation*, or comforter. For even judgment spells comfort—for the oppressed. The face of the Lord is set against all manner of wickedness—what a comfort! Wrong cannot triumph, for the rule of right is supreme at the heart of the universe; and when the rule of right is supreme in the heart of a man, these become the two poles of his destiny. The will of God is responded to by the will of man, and the tiny sphere of man's life, which revolves between, is ever encircled in the sunlight of the divine favour.

“ So be it Lord, Thy Throne shall never,
 Like earth's proud empires, pass away ;
 But stand and rule, and grow for ever,
 Till all Thy creatures own Thy sway.”

8. THE PROPHET ZEPHANIAH.—Like Diogenes in the streets of Athens, Zephaniah is represented in pictures carrying a lantern. The idea was doubtless suggested by chap. i. 12, where we read : “ I will search Jerusalem with candles, and I will punish the men who are settled on their lees ” (*cf.* Jer. xlviii. 11). It is a description of those who are living at ease in Zion, and who are totally unconcerned about the higher interests of religion and morality. If they express any opinion on the subject, it is to say that Jehovah is too far removed from nature and man to take any active interest in human affairs. “ The Lord will not do good, neither will he do evil.” But it is not so, is the reply of Zephaniah. Jehovah is a God of righteousness (*cf.* iii. 5), and with the candle of His divine jealousy, He will search out all these refuges of lies. “ The great day of the Lord is near, . . . and the whole land shall be devoured by the fire of his jealousy ; for he shall make an end, yea, a terrible end, of all them that dwell in the land ” (i. 14-18). And the lesson is one for the individual, no less than for the nation—a greater than Zephaniah comes carrying a lantern (*cf.* Rev. iii. 20).

1. *The Prophet's Royal Ancestry.*

In chap. i. 1. he is described as the great-great-grandson of Hezekiah, and it is in the highest degree probable that this ancestor was none other

than Hezekiah, King of Judah. The objections which have been urged against this supposition are not conclusive. It is, no doubt, exceptional to carry back the descent of a prophet through four generations, but if there be a sufficient reason for doing so, this need be no insuperable difficulty in the way of his royal ancestry. On the assumption that King Hezekiah was really the ancestor referred to, a sufficient reason does exist ; but otherwise, it is hard to see why his lineage should be traced back beyond the genealogy of his contemporaries (*cf.* Isa. i. 1., Jer. i. 1, Hosea i. 1). A more serious objection is suggested by the chronology. There does not seem to be sufficient room for four generations within the given time. Hezekiah died in 692,* and the date at which Zephaniah prophesied is usually placed before Josiah's reformation in 621; so that his birth cannot be fixed later than 642. Is there a sufficient interval of time between these two dates—692-642—to admit of four successive generations? In other words, is it probable that Zephaniah was born when his great-grand-father was not more than fifty years of age? To our western minds the period seems short enough ; but if we keep in view the early age of maturity in Syria there is nothing impossible or improbable in the matter. As little as the tracing of descent, does chronology present any serious objection to his royal origin.

The point is of practical value in view of the prophet's strictures on the sins of the royal family. "I will punish the princes, and the king's sons, and all such as are clothed with foreign apparel" (i. 8).

* "Ency. Biblica," 797-8.

It is one thing for a peasant prophet from Tekoa, or a village preacher from Moresheth-Gath, to rebuke the grandees of Samaria or Jerusalem ; but it is quite another thing for a member of the royal house to stand apart from the sons of the princes, and to expose in so unmeasured terms their foreign manners, and their high-handed oppression of the poor. It reminds us that Jehovah's instruments are found in all classes of the community ; and when the prince, no less than the peasant, receives the word of the Lord, considerations of birth or social prestige are set on one side, and the message of divine righteousness is heard even within the precincts of the palace.

2. *His Time.*

He prophesied in the days of Josiah, the son of Amon (i. 1). The precise years of his life are not given ; but the state of religion and manners described in his prophecy points to a time before Josiah's reformation. It was probably during the king's minority that Zephaniah first began to prophesy ; and it is not improbable that his preaching had a good deal to do with the reformation which Josiah effected. Living at such a time, and with all his interests centred in Jerusalem, the prophet presents a striking contrast to his contemporary Nahum. "Woe to the bloody city," the latter cried ; "it is all full of lies and robbery" : but the city he referred to was Nineveh, the capital of Assyria. She it was that had proved herself the enemy of mankind, and all the smaller neighbouring States would yet clap their hands over her destruction.

And Zephaniah is no less emphatic in the announcement of Nineveh's ruin (ii. 13-15): but when he cries out in iii. 1, "Woe to her that is rebellious and polluted, to the oppressing city!" the city he means is Jerusalem itself. Dwelling in the Jewish capital, he saw what Nahum could not see, that Judah, no less than Assyria, had merited the righteous vengeance of Jehovah. All through the years that succeeded the dark days of Manasseh, the inhabitants of Jerusalem had gone from bad to worse, until the terrible picture drawn by Zephaniah had become the woeful result—the prophets and the priests together knew no shame (iii. 4, 5). Thus, while both prophets were preachers of judgment, Zephaniah looked further afield than Nahum. Not Nineveh alone in the north, but Ethiopia in the south, the Philistines in the west, and Moab and Ammon in the east—and especially Israel, that sinful nation in the midst—all alike had become guilty of impiety and inhumanity, and would be searched, sifted and judged by the fire of the divine jealousy.

And Jehovah's instrument for the carrying out of this purpose was near at hand. It was found in the dreaded advance of *the Scythians*, which took place in the second half of the seventh century, and spread terror and confusion among the nations. Suddenly, above the natural boundary of the Caucasus, "appeared those strange, uncouth forms, hardly to be distinguished from their horses and their waggons, fierce as their own wolves or bears, sweeping towards the southern regions which seemed to them their natural prey. . . . Assyria,

Babylon, Media, Egypt, even Greece and Asia Minor, stood aghast at the spectacle of those savage hordes rushing down on the seats of luxury and power.* To the troubled gaze of Zephaniah it was like a plague of locusts. "I will utterly consume all things from off the ground, saith the Lord" (i. 2). "I will search Jerusalem with candles: and I will punish the men that are settled on their lees." And as for Nineveh, "the pelican and the porcupine shall lodge in the chapiters thereof: their voice shall sing in the windows."

3. *His Message.*

Zephaniah is first and foremost a preacher of *judgment*. (a) The judgment on Israel (i. 2, ii. 3), which falls on all classes alike—on man and beast (2, 3), on the devotees of false worship (4-7) and on princes, merchants, and people (8-13). It is characterised by all the terrors of the day of the Lord (14-18)—the splendid Latin hymn, *Dies irae*, being adopted from this passage by Thomas of Celano (thirteenth century). As for the meek of the earth, let them seek righteousness and meekness; it may be that they shall be hid in the day of the Lord's anger (ii. 1-3). (b) The judgment on the nations ii. 4-15), which sweeps out like a wave of desolation, and spreads disaster and dismay in all lands. From the Philistines in the west to Moab and Ammon in the east, and from Ethiopia in the south to Assyria in the north, the prophet sees the wave of desolation spread, until in Nineveh itself the beasts find a place to lie down in! and every one that passeth

* Stanley, "The Jewish Church," ii. p. 428.

by shall hiss and wag his head. (c) A renewed threat of judgment both on Israel and the nations (iii. 1-8). Jerusalem is the rebellious city (1, 2); every class within her is corrupt (3, 4); they refused to receive instruction (5-7), and therefore Jehovah will pour out upon them His indignation, and consume the whole earth in the fire of His jealousy (ver. 8).

But if Zephaniah looked farther afield than his contemporary Nahum, he also looks a great deal deeper. He sees the inner meanings of judgment. Behind the storm-clouds of universal judgment he sees the day of universal salvation. And, therefore, he is also a preacher of *restoration* (iii. 9-20). This whole section stands in the same relation to the rest of the prophecy as chap. ii. 1-3 stood to chap. i. Let the remnant of Israel, or the meek of the earth, seek after the God of righteousness, and it may be that they shall be hid in the day of the Lord's anger. It is first a promise to the nations (9, 10). When they have been corrected and purified by the judgments of the Lord, they shall serve Him with one consent, or *under one yoke* (Septuagint). Like a team of oxen ploughing in the furrow, the disciplined nations will submit to the divine law, and bring offerings and incense. Then follows a similar promise of salvation to Israel (11-13). She too will come out of the furnace purified as silver and tempered as steel. For in common with other Old Testament prophets, Zephaniah is assured that a remnant shall be saved (*cf.* Isa. x. 21; Joel ii. 32)—a remnant that trust in the name of the Lord, and, like a flock of sheep lying beside the still

waters, none shall make them afraid. The picture closes with a description of Israel in the golden age of the future (14-20). "The Lord thy God is in the midst of thee, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will be *silent in his love*" (R. V., margin). Silent in love! What a calm to succeed the whirlwind of the divine wrath. Our eyes fill and our bosom heaves. The tide has risen too high for verbal prayer or praise. For we too have to be silent in love—the very silence being an echo of His own ineffable calm. There is but one thought which does not jar with the still music of such a moment, the meaning of Zephaniah's name, *he whom Jehovah has hid*. We bow in adoration before the revelation of so profound an affection, and *are hid* under the shadow of the Almighty.

9. THE PROPHET HABAKKUK.—The name of the prophet is generally derived from the Hebrew verb *to embrace*, and may have been used as a title of endearment to express the name of a child. In spelling and pronunciation it was probably read Habbâkuk; for the Septuagint reading is *Ham-bakoum*, where the double *b* has been changed to *mb*, and the final *k* to *m*. Compare the analogous change of Beelzebub to Beelzebul—the Greek ear preferring the soft liquid sounds to the hard mutes, especially in the final syllable.

From the musical allusions in iii. 1, 19, some have suggested that Habakkuk was a Levite. But as King Hezekiah uses similar words in his psalm of thanksgiving (Isa. xxxviii. 20), and as these musical directions were probably added much later,

it is obvious that no conclusion can be drawn from such data, save that at one time or other chap. iii. was used in the musical service of the Temple, but that no weight can be attached to this fact with respect to the personal history of the prophet.

1. *His Date.*

This may be fixed with tolerable certainty in the reign of Jehoiakim (608-597). The language of i. 2-4, is best understood of this age of apostasy, when a reaction, both in faith and morals threatened to sweep away the last trace of Josiah's reformation. We have also the reference in ver. 6 to the rise of the Chaldeans, who invaded Palestine, and demanded the submission of Jehoiakim in 601. These considerations fix the prophet's date in the closing years of the seventh century, and place him immediately after the two contemporary prophets, Nahum and Zephaniah.

Josiah's reformation had not been so thorough and permanent as the narrative might lead us to suppose. The king himself, when he saw Assyria tottering to her fall, because the Medes and Chaldeans were thundering at her gates, thought that he too might assert his independence, and win for himself a place among the surrounding nations. But Pharaoh-necho, the ambitious ruler of Egypt, cherished similar ideals, and came north into Western Asia to seize all the lands west of the Euphrates. Josiah was not willing to have his aspirations crossed by the ambitions of such a rival; and he went out to withstand his progress at the fatal field of Megiddo (2 Kings xxiii. 29).

The enterprise ended in disaster, the king himself being slain (608); and when his son Jehoiakim was placed upon the throne, he ruled simply as an Egyptian vassal. The following year, however, Nineveh fell, and then Nebuchadnezzar was free to come to the West-land and measure swords with Pharaoh-necho. The two armies met at the fords of the Euphrates, and there, at the battle of Carchemish (605), the forces of Egypt were completely shattered. Pharaoh himself was driven back to his own land, and the whole of Western Asia fell to the lot of the Chaldean.

What of the little kingdom of Judah amid the claims and conquests of these mighty rivals? Surely if any king required a clear head on his shoulders in order to steer his kingdom through the storm, that king was Jehoiakim. But it was far otherwise. He had the example of a good father; but he himself was so frivolous and impious that he would have brought any State to the brink of ruin. He even cut the prophetic roll with a pen-knife. (Jer. xxxvi. 23). Well might Habakkuk exclaim, "O Lord, how long! . . . spoiling and violence are before me . . . the law is slacked . . . and judgment goeth forth perverted." Did it matter which world-conqueror Jehoiakim had to acknowledge as suzerain? He might as well pay tribute to Nebuchadnezzar as to Pharaoh-necho. But no, he allowed himself to play into the hands of Egypt, which was again playing for a stake in Western Asia: and on his refusing to pay his yearly tribute in 598-7, Nebuchadnezzar, the Chaldean ruler, was at the gates.

2. *The Chaldeans.*

To the prophet's cry "How long!" a divine answer comes in vers. 5, 6. "Lo, I raise up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation," and they shall punish the men who are complained of by the prophet. They march through the world like a marauding band of free-booters, and none can withstand the impetuosity of their onset. It is a terrible picture of fierceness and masterful ease which is added in vers. 7-11. They are more fierce than the evening wolves; they swoop upon the prey like the eagle; the striving of their faces is ever forwards, and they gather captives innumerable as the sand. Arrested for a moment by kings or strongholds, they again sweep onwards like the wind, until intoxicated with their own success they deify their own might.

But how can a holy God employ such agents for the carrying out of His purpose? (vers. 12-17). Is not this a greater problem than ever?—the problem which is the constant riddle of Old Testament theology: not the survival of the fittest, but *the suffering of the best*. Israel, with all her faults, was more righteous than this scourge of mankind, the Chaldean conqueror: and how could One, who was of purer eyes than to behold evil, hold His peace when the wicked was swallowing up the man that was more righteous than he? Think of his inhumanity! The poet has told us—

"Never to mix our pleasure or our pride
With sorrow of the meanest thing that feels."

but the Chaldean, in his pride of heart, was treating human beings as if they were the meanest—catching them in his net and gathering them in his drag; and instead of being touched at the sight of their agonies, he was rejoicing and exulting over their capture. And that his impiety was quite equal to his barbarity, was evident; for he deified his very weapons, no less than the might that wielded them—he sacrificed unto his net, and burnt incense unto his drag. “O Lord, my God,” is the prophet’s appeal to Heaven, “Thou hast established him for correction, shall he therefore empty his net, and not spare to slay the nations continually?”

The problem is harder than the prophet can solve; and therefore he betakes himself to his watch-tower to see what answer Jehovah will give to his remonstrance (ii. 1). And when the answer comes, it lays down a principle so vital (ver. 4) that Habakkuk is told to write it upon a tablet, and hang it up before the people.

*“Behold his soul is puffed up, it is not upright in him;
But the righteous shall live by his faithfulness.”*

This contains the key to the remainder of the prophecy.

3. *The Solution of the Problem.*

Corresponding to the first line on the tablet, chap. ii. 5-20 contains five woes pronounced against the Chaldean by those whom he had desolated. They take up a taunting proverb against him, and say, Woe to him for his insatiable lust of conquest (6-8); for the rapacity and injustice by which his empire

has been established (9-11); for the ruthless oppression exhibited in the building and beautifying of his capital (12-14); for the craft and wantonness by which he entrapped and intoxicated the nations, and then gloated over the exposure of their nakedness (15-17); and for his irrational and senseless idolatry (18-20). In essence, it is the same indictment as was brought by Nahum against Nineveh. If the work of correction be carried too far, if every instinct of humanity be violated by the ruthlessness of his conquest, then the Chaldean himself shall be punished. The smiter shall himself be smitten. And when his doom falls, no one shall bewail him; for he shall perish in the flames of his own kindling. "The Lord is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him."

The second line on the tablet, and the second half of the solution are fully dealt with in the grand ode which occupies chap. iii. It is the prophetic vindication of the truth, that "the righteous shall live by his faithfulness." Earnestly he prays, that in the storm of doom which was gathering around the nation, the Lord would revive His work in the midst of the years, and in wrath remember mercy (ver. 2). And the answer comes in a fuller manifestation of the God of righteousness, who, in every age of the Church, has come for the vindication and redemption of His people, and the subduing and judging of their enemies (3-15). He did so in all the great deliverances of the past, from the day they crossed the Red Sea to the time they entered, as an armed host, the land promised to their fathers. He came both for

salvation and destruction (ver. 13). And what He had been, He would yet be. He would come in all the plenitude of His power and glory: and while unutterable woe would be the portion of the wicked, the faithful nucleus, who were characterised by constancy and patience, would rest in the day of trouble (ver. 16). In the name of that faithful remnant, the prophet will even pen the beautiful language of 17-19, that amid the desolation and poverty of the dread Chaldean invasion, they would rejoice and calmly endure as seeing Him who is invisible.

“ For though the fig tree shall not blossom,
Neither shall fruit be in the vines;
The labour of the olive shall fail,
And the fields shall yield no meat:
The flock shall be cut off from the fold,
And there shall be no herd in the stalls;
Yet I will rejoice in the Lord,
I will joy in the God of my salvation.”

The storm may be dark, and the sun and moon may both withdraw their shining, outshone by the brightness of his glittering spear (ver. 11); but above and beyond the storm-clouds is the unfailing promise of His mercy, and that, like a rainbow, encircles and rounds off all the affairs of His Church; just as the arching heavens surround and enfold the little birds that fly to and fro in the sunshine. So that faith and patience are the gist and essence of Habakkuk's message: faith which is the attitude of a believing soul (*cf.* Gal. iii. 11), and patience which is the outcome of such an attitude. In fine, “the righteous shall live by his *faithfulness*.”

CHAPTER III.

THE POST-EXILIC PROPHETS.

10. THE BABYLONIAN EXILE. — Between Habakkuk the last of the pre-exilic minor prophets, and Haggai the first of the post-exilic, we have the long interval of fully eighty years. Within that period occurred one of the most momentous crises that can happen in the experience of any people—the severe discipline of the Babylonian Captivity. In order to hear the sound of running history on the other side of this gap, we may profitably insert, at this stage, one short section on the story of the Exile itself.

1. *Its beginning, and Jeremiah.*

When Nineveh fell in 606, the Medes and Chaldeans, or Neo-Babylonians, divided the spoils between them. Nabopalassar, the Chaldean king, had prepared the way for this by marrying his eldest son, Nebuchadnezzar, to the daughter of Cyaxares, king of the Medes. So that while the north and north-western parts of Assyria fell to the latter, the former, under their brilliant young general, laid claim to the south and west. In this way Nebuchadnezzar served himself heir to the suzerainty of Western Asia.

Beginning at this point, the story of Judah's

decline and fall, is easily told. It fell as a kind of buffer state between the two great rivals, Babylon and Egypt. Nebuchadnezzar in vindicating his claim to the West-land had to measure swords with Pharaoh-necho. He found his way barred at the fords of the Euphrates near the ancient city of Carchemish : and while Egypt was utterly defeated and driven back to her ancestral domains in the valley of the Nile, she never ceased to be a disturbing factor in the affairs of Western Asia. The safety of Jerusalem lay in humbly bowing the neck to the yoke of Babylon, and Jeremiah both in the time of Jehoiakim, and in the subsequent reign of Zedekiah, pled with the king and nobles to submit to the inevitable. But his pleading was in vain. Egypt as usual was pulling the strings ; and both Jehoiakim and Zedekiah were induced to cast off their allegiance. The result was, that a far heavier punishment was immediately inflicted upon them. Jehoiachin, the son of Jehoiakim, after a brief reign of three months, was carried away captive to Babylon, and with him 10,000 of the very flower of the nation ; and then eleven years later, in the year 586, Nebuchadnezzar returned to complete the work of desolation. The temple was burned to the ground, the walls were thrown down, and Jeremiah, the weeping prophet, according to the Septuagint, was left to sit among the ruins, and write the story of its fall, in the pathetic elegy of the Lamentations. "How doth the city sit solitary that was full of people ! How is she become as a widow ! She that was great among the nations, and princess among the provinces, how is she become tributary !"

2. Its continuance, and Ezekiel.

When the first deportation to Babylon took place under Jehoiachin in 597, a large colony of the exiles was located on the Chebar, one of the tributaries of the Euphrates. Among these was the prophet Ezekiel, who, for many years both before and after the fall of Jerusalem, sought to adapt the life of the captives to the changed conditions of their exile. Not, indeed, that we are to think of them as being harshly treated by the rivers of Babylon. The probability is, that having been deprived of all civil privileges in the land of their sojourn, they were considered harmless and inoffensive, and were left in great measure to themselves. But in any case, they required one like Ezekiel to speak to them in the name of the Lord, if the great ends to be served by the Exile were not to be lost sight of or frustrated. What were these ends? Chiefly, the purifying of Israel herself, that sinful nation, which was cast into the furnace of affliction until the pure metal of God's people was separated from the dross. Or to take the more daring figure of Ezek. xxiv. 1-14, Jerusalem was as a rusty pot, whose filthiness could not be removed by being burnt out; but which must be thrown into the furnace to be melted over again, so that its metal might be purged and rendered fit for a new cast.

For this end, they must make the most of the possessions they had. All ritual service had ceased when they left the home of their fathers, but just because of this, the spiritual elements of their religion must be enforced and developed. They

had the collecting and preserving of the sacred books which kept them in touch with the past. They had the Sabbath—a bond of union among themselves, and a badge of distinction from the heathen—the due observance of which would enable them to profit in the present. And so acting, they might well cherish the hope that in the covenant God of their fathers, they had a future—a future of great promise, that out of that valley of dry bones, their nation would yet arise an exceeding great army (Ezek. xxxvii), nay, that out of the grave of sin, they would yet come forth a purified, a recreated and Spirit-possessed church; and that Jehovah would be their God, and they would be His people (xxxvi. 25-28). Who shall say, in view of great results like these, that the hard discipline of the Exile was endured in vain?

3. *Its End, and Isa. xl.-lxvi.*

Jeremiah had stated that the Chaldean supremacy would last seventy years (xxv. 11, 12), and if we reckon the time from the battle of Carchemish, in 605, to the capture of Babylon, by Cyrus, in 538, the period, which is obviously a round number, is not so far from the mark after all. Nebuchadnezzar died in the year 561, and the kingdom, which owed its existence to his genius alone, did not survive his death for many years. No fewer than three of his successors were cut off in rapid succession, and then Nabonidus, the last of the Babylonian kings, ascended the throne in 555. But at this stage, we are on the eve of a great change in human history. For long ages the Semitic nations have been

supreme in the Oriental world. It is the story of their wars and achievements that is found in the rock inscriptions of the past. But now the power is to pass out of the hands of the Semites altogether ; for the great Indo-European nations of the north and west are beginning to rise and fill the horizon. We are approaching the classical epochs of Persia, Greece and Rome.

The one man who was raised up to bring about this epoch-making change was the brilliant conqueror, Cyrus the Persian. A descendant of the old Persian family of the Achaemenidae, he first appears in the history as a vassal of Astyages, the king of the Medes. In this position, he may have attended the Median court in his youth, and become, as some have suggested, son-in-law to Astyages. In any case, his condition of vassalage was not of long duration. He speedily set out on an unparalleled career of conquest, and not all the forces of Media, Persia, or Asia Minor could withstand the onset of his veterans. After subjugating Lydia, in the north, he turned southwards, and directed his energies against Babylon. And as he drew near to the Chaldean capital, in 538, the unknown prophets of the Exile were in a perfect delirium of joy, for the time to show favour to Zion had indeed come. In Isa. xxi. 9, one exclaims, "Babylon is fallen, is fallen, and all the graven images of her gods, he hath broken to the ground." And another in chap. xiv. 4-23, is led to take up a taunting proverb against the proud city and her king : "I will rise up against them, saith the Lord of Hosts, and cut off from Babylon name and remnant . . . I will

also make it a possession for the porcupine, and pools of water : and I will sweep it with the besom of destruction, saith the Lord of Hosts."

But the great prophecy that gathers up the feelings of Israel at the close of the Exile, is Isa. xl.-lxvi. : "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God ; speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned" (xl. 1-2). The name of Cyrus is expressly mentioned. "I am the Lord that saith of Cyrus : He is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure ; even saying of Jerusalem, she shall be built ; and to the temple, thy foundation shall be laid" (xliv. 28). But when the divine purposes are being wrought out in history, it is a wheel within a wheel. There is not only the outer movement among the nations—an outer movement which the divine Spirit has put into the hand of a Cyrus ; but there is also the inner movement in the affairs of God's Church—an inner movement, which the same divine Spirit has placed in the hand of the servant of the Lord. Who is that servant ? At the end of the exile, it meant none other than God's faithful remnant. And to that remnant the prophet is sent with three great truths, in the light of which they are to interpret their discipline and history.

(a) *Vicarious suffering*.—"For *thy sake* are we killed all the day long ; we are counted as sheep for the slaughter" (Ps. xlv. 22, Isa. liii.). As already indicated, this is not so much the survival of the fittest, as the suffering of the best. And such suffering spells redemption. Why not ? Shall we claim less for the man than we do for the animal ? If

the bleeding victim prefigure the great Sacrifice, why may not the suffering saint prefigure the great Sufferer? And if the patriarch prefigure, why may not the apostle fill up that which is lacking of the afflictions of Christ in his flesh for His body's sake, which is the Church? (Col. i. 24). The chastisement of the good is never an accident. It is a badge of sonship, a sacrament, a calling.

(b) *The world-wide purposes of Jehovah.*—"Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is none else" (Isa. xlv. 22). Jehovah was the God of Cyrus, no less than the God of Israel. He was controlling the destiny of even the Persian empire, and making it the instrument of His purpose. And therefore Jacob, His servant, who had been brought into contact with these world-powers, would yet be the means of blessing them with His grace and truth. "I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation, unto the end of the earth" (xlix. 6). This was not a creed that led the way to a Judaism that hated humanity; it was a world-wide gospel that longed to say, "Mine house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations." And, therefore (c), they had the soul-subduing message of *the divine love*. That love was more even than a mother's! Could human lips say more? "These may forget, yet will not I forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands" (xlix. 15). Vicarious suffering, world-wide grace, and unchanging love: little marvel this preacher has been called "The Evangelist of the Old Testament."*

* A. B. Davidson, 'The Exile and the Restoration,' p. 67.

II. THE PROPHET HAGGAI. — The main sources for the story of the Restoration are the two historical books Ezra and Nehemiah, and the three prophets, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi. It extends from the first edict of Cyrus in 538 to the completion of the walls under Nehemiah in 445. Not that we have a continuous narrative running through this entire period. There are large gaps in the history of which we know little or nothing. And while the few events that are well known cast a welcome light on an otherwise obscure situation, they oftentimes raise as many puzzles as they solve. We will try at least to indicate the main points.

1. *The Edict of Cyrus.*

Babylon was captured without fighting in 538, and within the year, permission was granted to the exiled Jews to return to their own land (Ezra i. 1-4). In all probability, Cyrus was led to adopt this policy from a variety of motives. He was shrewd enough to see that it had a most important bearing politically. The land of the pyramids had been too long the rival of the Euphrates valley to submit without a struggle to the growing power of Persia. Under its new ruler, Amasis, it was showing renewed activity in international affairs, and was certain to make its influence felt in the lands west of the Euphrates. It was therefore to the advantage of Cyrus to have a people well disposed to himself not far from the Egyptian frontier, a people on whose gratitude and faithfulness he could confidently rely in the impending struggle which seemed to be inevitable. So that if Jerusalem had fallen as a

buffer state between Babylon and Egypt, it was now to rise as a barrier reef between the same two ancient rivals. Besides, the old Assyrian policy of transporting large bodies of exiles into the very heart of the empire was now seen to be a political blunder. They had proved to be a serious menace to the safety of the state whenever it was assailed by external foes. They were only too ready, as the Jewish exiles had been, to cast in their lot with the invader. Hence, by one bold stroke, Cyrus resolved to attain both objects at once. He would remove a source of danger from the body politic, and erect a barrier between himself and Egypt, by allowing the captive Jews to return to their own land.

2. The Return under Zerubbabel and Joshua.

In the spring of the year 537, the captives began their long march homeward. They were probably drawn from all the families of Israel, and were not fewer than 50,000 souls. According to Ezra i. 8, they were under the leadership of the Persian official Sheshbazzar, into whose hands were also committed the sacred vessels of the sanctuary which had been carried away by Nebuchadnezzar in 597. A subordinate council of twelve elders (*cf.* Neh. vii. 7) was appointed for the management of internal affairs ; and among these, and occupying the highest offices in the council, were Zerubbabel, the grandson of Jehoiachin, and Joshua, the son of Jehozadak the high priest.

It is generally assumed that only the spiritually minded of the exiles returned under Zerubbabel and Joshua ; but if we bear in mind these two facts

(1) that those who remained behind contributed largely of their wealth ; and (2) that they afterwards provided both the men and means for bringing the work in Jerusalem to a successful completion ; we shall feel that the distinction as thus suggested is more apparent than real. Many of those who remained in Babylon were no more unmindful of the home and faith of their fathers than those who joined the first caravan in 537. When occasion offered they were willing to pray and sacrifice for the prosperity and peace of Jerusalem.

Allowing four months for the journey (*cf.* Ezra vii. 9), the pilgrims reached Jerusalem in time for the autumn festival which was held in the seventh month. They assembled as one man to the capital ; the altar of burnt-offering was erected on its old site ; the Feast of Tabernacles was duly celebrated ; and from that day onwards the stated feasts were regularly kept (Ezra iii. 1-4). But when they sought to begin the erection of the Temple in the spring of 536 (vers. 8-13), they got into difficulty with the half-caste people of Samaria, who desired to have a share in the work and worship of Jehovah : and so far did these "people of the land" carry their opposition, that they prevailed upon the Persian authorities to stop the work, and it ceased for about sixteen years, until the second year of Darius, King of Persia (Ezra iv. 4, 5).

3. *The Rise of Prophecy.*

In the same year, 520, prophecy once more awoke, and the occasion of its rise is not far to seek. Haggai ii. 7, speaks of a shaking of the

nations, and the accuracy of this description is fully borne out by the facts. Important changes were taking place in the royal house of Persia. Cambyzes, the degenerate son of the great Cyrus, had committed suicide in 522, and as he left no son, the crown passed to another branch of the Achæmenians—the Persian branch proper—and this was the signal for a general uprising throughout the entire empire. Excitement reigned everywhere : the subject states cast off their allegiance ; and the whole fabric of the constitution was in danger of going to pieces. But Darius, the new ruler proved himself equal to the emergency. He grappled with the difficulties as they arose ; and so succeeded in restoring order and tranquillity that the threatened collapse of the Persian rule was successfully averted.

It was in these circumstances that prophecy once more found a voice. In order to keep a firmer hold of Jerusalem, Darius had raised Zerubbabel from his place in the council of elders, to the proud position of governor of Judea, and this elevation of a scion of the house of David gave Haggai his opportunity. He was an old man, one of those who had seen the house of God in its “former glory” (ii. 3) ; and having walked round the ruins, and gazed upon the Temple now lying waste and neglected, he appeared before Zerubbabel and Joshua on the first day of the sixth month, and proclaimed by the word of the Lord, a solemn message of warning and reproof.

4. *His Message.*

The book of Haggai, which is mainly concerned

with the rebuilding of the temple, contains four short prophecies which are easily distinguished from one another :—

(1) A message of *rebukey* (i. 1-11). The prophet reproaches the people, through their civil and spiritual leaders, for dwelling in their own cieled houses while the house of God was lying waste. It was no excuse to say, that the time had not yet come for rebuilding the house of the Lord. Their own presence in Jerusalem, after so long a period of exile, was a sufficient proof that God's set time to remember Zion had indeed arrived. Let them go up into the hill country, and bring wood and build the house. Not only would it be a credit to themselves, but the Lord would take pleasure in it and use it as His Temple.

(2) A message of *encouragement* (ii. 1-9). No sooner did the walls begin to rise, than the spirit of the builders was much discouraged by the disparaging comments of the old men. They had seen the magnificence of the former Temple, and, in comparison with it, the present building was as nothing in their eyes. It was truly a day of small things. But Haggai stood up before the people on the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles and assured them that there was no ground for such ungracious murmurs. Humble though the beginnings were, the latter glory of that house would be greater than the former ; for the desirable things of all nations would be brought into it, and in that place the Lord of Hosts would give peace. Only let them enter, with appreciation, into the fulness of the divine promise, that the Lord of Hosts was with them by

His Spirit, and in spite of the diminished splendour of the rising Temple, that house would yet be filled with the glory of God.

(3) A message of *instruction* (ii. 10-19). Two months later, the prophet sought to explain and enforce the lessons already conveyed in his previous utterances. He recurred to the severe discipline of the harvest, to which he had referred in chap. i. 9-11, and asked what was the explanation of that calamity? Simply the self-seeking worldliness of their disposition which had infected everything they touched, like the touch of ceremonial uncleanness polluting that which is clean (vers. 13, 14). No sacrifices laid on God's altar could atone for such worldliness and secularity ; and therefore they had been smitten with blasting, mildew and hail in all the work of their hands (ver. 17). But now let them go forward in the work of restoration, let them not slack their hand in laying stone upon stone in the Temple of the Lord ; and even though there was no seed in the barn, and no earnest that the promise was to be fulfilled, abundant seasons would again be bestowed upon them—"from this day I will bless you."

(4) An additional promise addressed to Zerubbabel on the evening of the same day (vers. 20-23). The great empires of the world might be shaken and come to naught, but the Kingdom of Israel, as represented by Zerubbabel, would survive and outlast the storm. It had been chosen of God as His peculiar treasure ; and that election was the pledge and forecast of its promised greatness and glory. Zerubbabel himself was addressed by the lofty title

of Jehovah's servant. So that the doom pronounced on Jeconiah (Jer. xxii. 24) was at last reversed, and Zerubbabel, as the representative of the house of David, was restored to the position of Jehovah's signet.* The Davidic king, both present and future, had become as a signet on God's right hand.

12. THE PROPHET ZECHARIAH.—Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo, must have been comparatively young when he began to prophesy. He is not to be identified with the "young man" referred to in chap. ii. 4; but if his grandfather Iddo was one of the priests that went up from Babylon with Zerubbabel and Joshua in 537 (Neh. xii. 4), Zechariah himself could not have been of any great age when he became a prophet in 520. His first recorded prophecy overlaps the work of Haggai, being dated one month earlier than Haggai's concluding message (Zech. i. 1, Hag. ii. 20), but as the latter was one of the old men who had seen the house of God in its former glory, Zechariah can only be described as his younger and more ideal colleague. Albeit the imagery of the younger prophet far excelled the plain prose of the older; still the claims of the aged are not to be overlooked. "Thou shalt rise up before the hoary head, and honour the face of the old man, I am the Lord" (Lev. xix. 32).

1. *A Book of Visions.*

In the first part of the book of Zechariah we meet a new style of prophecy. The impassioned speech of the older prophets has given place to

* Cf. Kirkpatrick, "Doctrine of the Prophets," p. 424.

a series of visions which are interpreted to the prophet by an angel. Instead of a simple declaration of the inspired word of Jehovah, Zechariah betakes himself, like Savonarola,* to the delineation of certain mysterious revelations vouchsafed to him in the watches of the night. We have, first, the man among the myrtle trees, accompanied by four apocalyptical riders who had arrived, like the couriers of some heavenly mail, on four horses of different colours (i. 7-17). Haggai had assured the people that in a little while there would be a shaking of the nations, and that out of this time of crisis the Messianic hopes of Israel would be gloriously realised. But four months had elapsed since then, and still there were no signs of the approaching political upheaval. The mounted scouts of Jehovah had returned to the Angel of the Lord, who was standing among the myrtle trees, and said, "We have walked to and fro through the earth, and behold (there is no hint of any impending change) all the earth sitteth still and is at rest." This was sad news! but Jehovah hastened to reassure the angel that the shaking of the nations would certainly come to pass, and that Zion's cities, through the blessing of prosperity, would be multiplied and spread abroad. This is the meaning of the next two visions—the vision of the four horns (*i.e.* the hostile world-powers) which were cowed and cast down by four smiths (i. 18-21): and the vision of the young man with the measuring line, who was informed that his attempt to mark out the boundaries of the city was utterly futile; for so great

* Villari's "Life and Times of Savonarola," p. 154.

would be the influx of exiles from all the surrounding nations, that Jerusalem would overflow into the adjoining villages, and become, not a walled town, but a densely populated district. It had no walls, and needed none. "He that toucheth you, toucheth the apple of His eye" (ii. 1-13).

Then in visions four and five, we have the purification of the Church (chap. iii.), and the upbuilding of the Community (chap. iv.) Joshua, the religious head of the people, was cleansed and reinstated in the house of the Lord : and Zerubbabel, their civil head, was instructed, by the symbolism of the candlestick, that before him every mountain would become a plain, and he himself would bring forth with shoutings the headstone of the Temple. Their sense of sin might be deep, and their feebleness as a people might be intense, but the filthy garments had been removed, and the consecrated oil was seen to be perennial ; so that spiritually and politically they might rest in the assured word of Jehovah. "Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit saith the Lord."

The remaining three visions were equally well suited to the needs of the struggling community. A curse, like a flying roll, was pronounced against every form of crime in the land (v. 1-4) : and guilt, personified as a woman, was cast into an ephah, and carried away to Chaldea, where it was to find a home for the future (vers. 5-11) : while the prophet, reverting once more to the imagery of his first vision, closes the series by portraying four teams of celestial warriors who walked to and fro through the earth, and inflicted punishment on all those

who had oppressed the people of Jehovah. They went forth like the four winds, and quieted his spirit in the north country (vi. 1-8).

Thus restored and defended, and crowned as Joshua was with the silver and gold which had been brought from Babylonia (vers. 9-15), the question raised by the men of Bethel (vii. 2 R.V.) was more than answered, that joy and not sadness was in the house of Judah, and that therefore the fast days of the Babylonish captivity had become an anachronism (chaps. vii., viii). Under these appeals the work of erecting the Temple was pushed forward with vigour, and though various external difficulties are referred to in Ezra v., vi., these were eventually surmounted; and Haggai and Zechariah had the satisfaction of seeing their efforts crowned with success. The Temple was completed and dedicated in 515 B.C., having been four and a half years in building (Ezra vi. 15-22).

2. *A Book of Messianic Prophecy.*

In the second part of the book of Zechariah we are transported into a new world. Instead of a series of visions, accurately dated, and referring, like those in the first part, to the building of the Temple, we have a historical situation so obscure and a number of Messianic prophecies so ideal, that many have found in chaps. ix.-xiv., not the work of Zechariah at all, but the work of one or more prophets who lived in totally different circumstances. Certain historical allusions, as the threatening of Syria, Phœnicia, and Philistia (ix. 1-7), or the reference to Egypt and Assyria (x. 11), or the

national mourning for the death of Josiah (xii. 11), have led some to postulate a pre-exilic date as the most suitable standpoint for these six chapters. But other references—such as the allusion to the Babylonish captivity (x. 6-11), or the absence of a king in Judah, implied in her joy at the advent of the Messianic King (ix. 9), and especially the mention of the Greeks (ver. 13)—have disposed others to seek a post-exile date as far down as the conquests of Alexander (*cir.* 330). On the other hand, if we bear in mind the comparatively early age at which Zechariah began to prophesy, as well as the very different problems and the changed circumstances that must have been reflected in his later teaching, it may not seem an unreasonable suggestion that these concluding chapters may have been the work of Zechariah after all. In the years that followed the completion of the Temple, the hopes of the Jewish colony must more and more have turned to the future; and if the man of vision became in his later years a preacher of Messianic ideals, this, in view of mental growth and social necessities, is just what might have been expected. Be this as it may, we turn under a closing paragraph to the prophecies themselves.

(a) The coming of the Prince of Peace—"lowly, and riding upon an ass" (ix. 9, 10). Under His benign sway, the instruments of war are no longer needed; and as the ideal limits of the Hebrew state had been brought into subjection (vers. 1-8), His dominion extends from sea to sea (*i.e.*, from the Dead Sea to the Mediterranean), and from the river (the Euphrates) to the ends of the earth. Lowly,

and yet victorious ! It is a union of elements which is distinctly new. The triumphant king of the Isaianic prophecies, and the Suffering Servant of Jehovah, are here for the first time in prophecy set side by side (*cf.* Luke xix. 29).

(*b*) The rejection of the good shepherd, who was prized at thirty pieces of silver (xi. 12, 13). The flock of Jehovah had been shamefully maltreated by hireling shepherds (ver. 5), and the prophet, as Jehovah's representative, was commissioned to undertake the duty himself. This he did with his two pastoral staves *graciousness* and *union* (ver. 7). But so little did the flock appreciate the shepherd's care that, when he asked them to say whether or not he should continue to watch over them, they weighed out for his hire thirty pieces of silver, the price of a common slave (Ex. xxi. 32), and allowed him to go his way. If the sequel to this parable has been rightly found in chap. xiii. 7-9, the rejection of the shepherd was carried a step further. It ended in the murder of the one whom they had set at naught, or the smiting of the man who was Jehovah's fellow. So that the picture of the good shepherd, like that of the triumphant king, was closely associated with the suffering servant : they both point forward to Him who laid down His life for the sheep (John x. 11).

(*c*) If chap. xiii. 7-9 be the sequel to the rejection of the shepherd, it is also in its right place as the clue to the interpretation of chap. xii. 10. It is a difficult text ; but, as it stands, it can only mean that the one whom they pierced was none other than the shepherd whom they had despised. For in every picture

of the Messianic fulfilment, that solemn tragedy can never again be absent. It will continue to be limned with ever growing distinctness on the shifting screen of the future. It is the one sin for which the inhabitants of Jerusalem will mourn as a nation ; and mourn all the more intensely, the more the spirit of grace and supplication is poured out upon them. "They shall look unto me, whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him as one mourneth for his only son." Albeit, the day of humiliation will also be a day of purification (xiii. 1), and all idols, false prophets and unclean spirits shall be swept out of the land (vers. 2-6). And then shall come to pass the end of all Old Testament pedagogy—the people of Jehovah, refined as silver, and tried as gold, shall be an inwardly holy church, a purified remnant.

The prophecy closes with an appropriate picture of Jehovah's sovereignty over all the earth (xiv. 9). The day of the Lord, as all the prophets had seen, might be ushered in with gloominess and battle (vers. 1-2), but Jehovah their God would appear on the Mount of Olives, and all the holy ones with Him, and at evening time it would be light (ver. 7). Jerusalem would dwell in safety, and even the remnant of the nations would come up year by year to worship the Lord, and keep the Feast of Tabernacles. And in that day there would be no more a trafficker in the house of the Lord ; for "*Holy unto the Lord*" would be even on the bells of the horses.

13. THE PROPHET MALACHI.—Of the prophet himself nothing definite is known. His name, Malachi, which means "my messenger," is assumed

by some to be an official title, and not a personal appellation (*cf.* iii. 1). The proper name does not occur in the Septuagint; and a Jewish tradition, approved of by Jerome, has even conjectured that the author of this prophecy was Ezra, the priest and scribe. But whether personal or official, the name, as thus defined, is full of meaning. It seems to indicate that in those last times of the theocracy, the servants of God were beginning to long for a fuller revelation than anything as yet vouchsafed to Israel: not a mere continuance of prophecy which might declare to man the message of Jehovah, but the advent of Jehovah Himself in all His power and glory, and each prophet, the *messenger* or herald of that divine fact. This was all that Haggai (i. 13) or Malachi cared to be or do. They were voices crying in the wilderness: "Prepare ye the way of the Lord."

1. *His Period.*

After the completion of the temple, in 515, the curtain falls over the history of Israel, and for well-nigh sixty years the story of the Jewish colony is almost an entire blank. It is not until the age of Ezra (458) that the curtain again rises, unless, indeed, the little book of Malachi is to be dated a few years earlier, about 460. Whether before or after that event, it belongs confessedly to the same period, and reflects, as in a mirror, the condition of Israel after the first ardour of the age of Zerubbabel had got time to cool.

The period was one of deep, spiritual declension; and the reason for this decline is not hard to

discover. The returned exiles had been disappointed in all their hopes. Inspired by the glowing imagery of the exilic prophets, they had returned to their own land, and restored the Temple of Jehovah on its old site. But where was the evidence that the promised inheritance was about to be realised? Where was the sign of crisis among the nations, with the subsequent expansion of the Jewish community? A full half century had elapsed since then, and still there was no indication of the coming greatness. Nay, instead of expansion, the trend of affairs seemed all the other way. They were still living under the yoke of Persia; and feeble and indigent as they were, they had a hard struggle to secure the bare necessities of life. The God in whom they trusted had evidently forgotten them. He had neither kept His promise nor manifested His power. In feebleness, or in fickleness, He had abandoned them to their fate, and permitted the Gentile nations to harass them at their pleasure. What was their duty in view of such a desertion? Was there any use in worshipping a Deity who was either powerless to do them good or indifferent to their welfare? Would it not be better to form an alliance with those outside, who seemed to enjoy a measure of prosperity which they themselves did not enjoy, so that through the medium of trade and social intercourse, or even through intermarriage, they might mix and become one with the people of the land? Both priests and people had begun to be infected with this spirit of unbelief, and in carelessness or idle mockery they tried to forget the misery of their time. Step by step they drifted away from the faith

of their fathers, until they were ready to ask in open impiety : "Where is the God of judgment?" (Mal. ii. 17). The answer, indeed, was a great deal nearer than some of them imagined. The God of Israel had not forgotten them ; neither was He unmindful of His promise. He still remembered the oath which He swore to their fathers, and therefore this other messenger was being sent to summon them to penitence or—judgment.

2. *His Message.*

Taking his stand on the unchanging love of God for Israel (i. 2), he entreats, rebukes and warns the entire community with respect to three great evils which had marred the spirituality of their ideal.

(a) *Polluted Worship* (i. 6—ii. 9). This stern reproof falls mainly upon the priests (i. 6, ii. 1) ; for as the appointed guides and teachers of the people, they were chiefly responsible for the regulation of the worship and the conduct of the worshippers. The worship itself was so disreputable that they would not have dared to offer to the Persian governor the miserable gifts they were seeking to palm off on Jehovah (i. 8). They sacrificed the blind, the lame and the sick, and said it was no evil ; and then marvelled that the Lord of Hosts did not accept their persons. But better a Temple closed than a Temple profaned. Better no worship at all than a polluted worship. "Oh that there were one among you that would shut the doors, that ye might not kindle fire on mine altar in vain" (i. 10, R.V.). One reason is stated in ver. 11. The worship of Jehovah was not restricted

to the priests and services of Jerusalem. The Jews of the Dispersion, and numerous proselytes from heathenism, were worshipping the God of Israel in other lands ; and their simple offering of praise and prayer was dearer to His heart than all the polluted sacrifices of the Jewish colony. Yea, His Name, which was being profaned by their heartless worship, would yet be known and magnified among the heathen.

Besides, let them recall, as it was their duty to do, the greatness of their ideal, as seen in the covenant with Levi (ii. 4-7). Teaching, no less than ritual, was a function of the priesthood. "The law of truth was in his mouth, and iniquity was not found in his lips." But, alas, the example of Levi had not been followed by the priests in the time of Malachi. Instead of instruction, they had turned aside out of the way, and caused many to stumble in the law (ver. 8). They had corrupted the covenant of Levi, and made the table of the Lord contemptible ; and now the curse of Jehovah was about to come upon them—they were to be made contemptible and base before all the people. Their proffered sacrifices would be rejected with disdain, and a blight would fall even upon their blessings (vers. 2, 3).

(2) *Broken Marriage Vows* (ii. 10-16). Remissness in worship was accompanied by a corresponding remissness in morality. The corrupting of the covenant of Levi had led to another desecration—the violation of the covenant of marriage. They had dealt treacherously against the wife of their youth, and married the daughter of a strange god

(*cf.* Ezra ix., x.). In essence, this social evil was a sin against covenant love. Malachi lays down the principle that they were the covenant people of Jehovah (ver. 10). They had been separated from all the nations to be a peculiar people unto Himself. It was in this sense that He had created them and made them one (ver. 15). He was seeking through their election a holy seed. No doubt He had the residue of the spirit, and could have chosen other nations ; and Esau, no less than Jacob, might have been the “godly seed” which He sought. But it was not so. Jacob He had loved, but Esau He had hated (i. 2) ; and no amount of equivocation could alter that divine fact. Hence to speak of joining together what Jehovah had put asunder was not only vain—it was a sin against the purity of their ideal. It was bringing the abominations of idolatry into the holy nation ; and even on its human side, the baleful effects were already apparent. The bringing in of the idolatresses had led to the putting away of their own Jewish wives ; and the altar of God was covered with the tears and sighing of those who were put away. These tears would not be forgotten. He who had been the divine witness at their marriage contract, would be the vindicator of all those who had been so treacherously dealt with ; and He would visit the men who were guilty of this unrighteousness with utter extermination (ver. 12).

“ If he should ask

Why left you wife and children? For my sake,

According to my word? And I replied,

‘ Nay, Lord, for *Art.*’ Why, that would sound so mean

That all the dead who wait the doom of Hell
 For bolder sins than mine . . .
 Would turn and glare at me, and point and jeer
 And gibber at the worm, who living made
 The wife of wives a widow-bride, and *lost*
Salvation for a sketch." *

Lost salvation for a sketch ! It is a fearful possibility—the possibility of losing the eternal home, through being unfaithful to the home on earth. The beautiful language of the Talmud cannot be emphasised too strongly : “He who forsakes the love of his youth, God’s altar weeps for him.”

(3) *Open impiety or unbelief* (ii. 17—iv. 2). This was the taproot of their degeneracy both in worship and morality—they had asked in the flippancy of unbelief : “Where is the God of judgment ?” (ii. 17). And the answer of the prophet is clear and decisive. “The Lord whom ye seek shall suddenly come to His temple. . . . And I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against false swearers, and against those that oppress the hireling in his wages . . . and fear not me, saith the Lord of Hosts” (iii. 1-5). True, that day had been delayed ; but it was not because Jehovah had changed (ver. 6), but because they, the sons of Jacob, had departed from the covenant ; and God, in peerless mercy, would give them space for repentance. Oh that they would repent even now, and bring all the tithes into the storehouse ! Would not the windows of heaven be opened above them, and a blessing poured out, that there would not be room enough to receive it ? All nations

* Tennyson, “Romney’s Remorse.”

would call them happy, and they would be a delightful land, saith the Lord of Hosts (vers. 10-12).

But if not, then that day of the Lord would come in a very different guise. It will come and burn as a furnace; and all the proud and all that work wickedness shall be stubble; and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of Hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch (iv. 1). And what of the faithful remnant? What of those who feared the Lord and thought upon His name? Would they perish? No, on the day appointed they will be acknowledged before angels and men as God's "peculiar treasure": and He will spare them as a man spareth his own son that serveth him (ii. 16, 17). And in the brightness of the Messianic fulfilment, they shall rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory. "The sun of righteousness shall arise with healing in his wings, and ye shall go forth and gambol as calves of the stall" (iv. 2).

Polluted worship, broken marriage vows, and open and profane impiety—these form the warp and woof of Malachi's entire message; and they prepare the way for the earnest appeal with which the prophecy concludes, that Israel should remember the law of Moses, with all its statutes and judgments, lest Jehovah come and smite the earth with a curse.

CHAPTER IV.

PROPHETS OF UNCERTAIN DATE.

14. **THE PROPHET JOEL.**—Nothing definite is known of the man himself. In ver. 1 he is called the son of Pethuel (Septuagint, Bethuel) ; but where he lived or when he prophesied is altogether uncertain. From the fact that he does not mention a king but gives great prominence to the priests and the temple services, and moreover makes no allusion to Syria, Assyria, or Babylon, an effort has been made to fix his date by such internal evidence alone. But the data are so vague and inconclusive, that while some hold he lived and prophesied in the reign of Joash (*cir.* 850 B.C.), others place him in the post-exilian period 450 years later. It is best to confess that so far as the prophet himself is concerned we know little or nothing about him. But just for this reason we may turn with greater interest to the nature of his teaching. Receiving, as it does, no weight from the personality of the prophet, it may tell the more forcibly, and shine the more brightly through the inherent force and clearness of its own truth.

There are three key-words in the Book of Joel which may conveniently sum up the prophet's teaching. (*a*) A plague of locusts. (*b*) The out-

pouring of the spirit of prophecy. (c) The solemn prediction of the day of the Lord, in which the nations are gathered into the valley of Jehosaphat, where they are trodden in the wine-press of the Divine anger.

1. *A Plague of Locusts.*

It was like the plague which visited Egypt in the time of Moses, when they ate up everything that the hail had left (Ex. x. 12). Pharaoh called for Moses "in haste," and said, "I have sinned, intreat the Lord your God that he may take away from me this death only." And Moses did so. He intreated the Lord, and a west wind swept them into the Red Sea. Something similar had now befallen, not the enemies of Jehovah, but Israel, God's chosen people. A swarm of locusts had come, not from the south or south-east, the usual direction of such a plague, but from the north (*cf.* "northern army" ii. 20); and were spreading ruin all over the country. They came over the hill tops darkening the sky, and marched through the land like an attacking army, no one breaking their ranks. The prophet exhausts his store of imagery in trying to describe the terrible advance of this foe. They ate up everything. Eden became a wilderness in their march, and all the flocks and herds were faced with starvation (ii. 3-9). It recalls an experience of Dr Thomson, who describes a contest with an army of marching locusts in the summer of 1845. "Summoning all the people I could collect, we went out to meet and attack them, hoping to stop their progress altogether, or, at least, to turn aside

the line of their march . . . But their number was astounding ; the whole face of the mountain was black with them. On they came, like a living deluge. We dug trenches and kindled fires, and beat and burned to death 'heaps upon heaps,' but the effort was utterly useless." They destroyed every green leaf. "I saw large fig orchards 'clean bare,' not a leaf remaining ; and as the bark of the fig-tree is of a silvery whiteness, the whole orchards, thus rifled of their green veils, spread abroad their branches 'made white' in melancholy nakedness to the burning sun." *

It may be imagined what such a calamity would mean to an agricultural people like the Hebrews. Through the failure of the flour and oil, all joy was withered away from the sons of men, and even the altar of God was deprived of its daily offerings. And what did the people do? Probably nothing, except to stand in dumb amazement ; "their faces gathered blackness." One thing the priests did : they clothed themselves with sackcloth, and lay all night before the altar, mourning with a grievous lamentation (i. 13). "With bare breasts they waved their black drapery towards the Temple, and shrieked aloud, 'Spare thy people, O Lord.'" † All alike felt that no human means could cope with such a visitation. The hand of Divine judgment had been raised against them.

But hark ! there came the sound of the consecrated ram's horn calling them to the Temple (ii. 15-17). A prophet of the Lord had appeared,

* "The Land and the Book," p. 416.

† Stanley, "The Jewish Church," ii. 371.

and this, in one word, was the remedy he suggested—the awe-inspiring call to *repentance*. Let them sanctify a fast, let them call a solemn assembly, let old and young, bridegroom and bride, appear before the Lord with true compunction of soul. But this implies two things. (a) A rending of the hearts and not the garments; for that is the keynote of all spiritual service. (b) A realising of the nature of the God who demands it; for “he is gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger and plenteous in mercy, and repenteth him of the evil” (ii. 13). It is the latter conception which is the more potent of the two. It was the thought of the Father’s house, rather than the degradation of the swine-troughs that melted the heart of the Prodigal Son.

2. *The Spirit of Prophecy.*

In answer to the people’s prayer, the prophet announces a full restoration of the Divine favour, culminating in an unprecedented outpouring of the spirit of prophecy. But this is prefaced, as in the prophets generally, by the promise of temporal prosperity (ii. 19-27). There would be the removal of the enemy, the locusts (ver. 20), and the bestowal of all the blessings of corn, wine and oil. “I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten” (vers. 24-26). Let no one say that the Lord afflicts willingly, or impoverishes His people without cause. He is the giver of every perfect boon, and only punishes that He may teach. The Lord turned again the captivity of Job. And your Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.

Thus restored to the Divine favour, they are

bidden look forward to the greatness of their spiritual ideal. The divineness of their calling lies not in temporal prosperity, but in the domain of inspired prophecy. "Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy" (vers. 28, 29). No longer would they be dependent on one like Joel for the reality of the divine endowment. The wish of Moses would be amply fulfilled—"Would God that all the Lord's people were prophets, that the Lord would put his spirit upon them" (Num. xi. 29). Even their young men would see visions; and it is the vision that saves. The curse of any life is to be blind to the forces that operate in the spiritual world. Bereft of these, what is life but a drudgery, not an inspiration and a joy, but—the man with the muck-rake.

But if the promise of Joel thus gathers up the prayer of Moses, it also leads the way to the fulfilment of Pentecost (*cf.* Acts ii. 16). Not indeed that we are to seek the fulness of the New Testament doctrine amid the types and shadows of even Old Testament prophecy. It is an acorn we have in the realm of prophetic teaching, and away forward in the era of fulfilment we seek, not an exact image of the thing typified, but the magnitude and magnificence of the full-grown oak. But none the less, the prediction of Joel was a real anticipation of Pentecost. For the effect produced by the Spirit in the Acts of the Apostles is quite distinct from that which is declared in the Gospels and the Epistles. We listen to Jesus in John's Gospel, and the Spirit comes to convince the world of sin and to regenerate the soul. We turn to the Epistles of Paul, and the

Spirit is a principle of life in the heart, which grows and matures, and produces all the fruits of holy living. But it is quite otherwise in Joel, and in the discourses of the Acts. The Spirit is now conceived as a divine endowment coming upon the servants of God and fitting them for service, *i.e.* for witness-bearing (Acts i. 8). He comes upon the individual members of the Church as once He came upon the leaders and organs of the theocracy, to fit them with special gifts and qualifications for the perfect discharge of their tasks.

3. *The Day of the Lord.*

This era of fulfilment, with its fulness of promise for Israel, will mean something very different for the enemies of Jehovah. The day of the Lord, to which all the prophets look forward, is portrayed by Joel in the most graphic terms. It is a day that is to be heralded by the shout of battle. "Beat your ploughshares into swords : your pruning-hooks into spears : let the weak say, I am strong." For "Egypt shall be a desolation, and Edom shall be a desolate wilderness, for the violence done to the children of Judah, because they have shed innocent blood in the land." But especially is it a time of arbitrament and decision. The nations are to be gathered into the valley of Jehoshaphat (= *Jehovah judges*), and their recompense is to return upon their own head. They had sold the children of Jerusalem as captives to the sons of the Grecians, and now their children, in turn, would be sold by the sons of Judah to a people afar off, even to the

Sabæans at the head of the Persian Gulf, for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it (chap. iii.)

This is the use which Joel has made of the terrible scourge of the locusts. A temporal judgment has been made the forecast of that which is final and universal. Compare Matt. xxiv., xxv., where, beginning with the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, Jesus rises to something infinitely more solemn—the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. A temporal visitation has been caught up in the glory of the Second Advent. In like manner Joel lifted his pen to describe the devastation caused by the locust plague, and before he closes, he writes these soul-subduing words, “Put ye in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe: come, tread ye, for the wine-press is full, the fats overflow, for their wickedness is great.” Such language is not confined to the book of Joel. Never one used language so solemn as the Lord Himself. “These shall go away into eternal punishment.” All those who persecute the Church of God, or put stumbling-blocks in the pathway of the young, shall be gathered into the valley of Jehoshaphat and trodden in the wine-press of the divine fury. And yet like a bow of promise irradiating the darkness of that “terrible day,” these words of Joel may be taken as the basis of an eternal hope. “Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be delivered; for in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those that escape, as the Lord hath said, and among the remnant those whom the Lord doth call” (ii. 32).

15. THE PROPHET OBADIAH.—This is another

prophet whose date is much disputed. His name the "servant of Jehovah," is of frequent occurrence in Scripture, and is borne especially by the godly chamberlain of Ahab's house in the stirring times of Elijah (1 Kings xviii. 3). But whether the author of this short prophecy is to be identified with this best-known Obadiah (as an early Hebrew tradition supposes), is a point that is left altogether uncertain. We can only say of the prophet what may be said of many another servant of God, that the work was more important than the worker ; and that for the sake of the work, the worker himself was prepared to allow his personality to slip into the background.

1. *Edom.*

The work of Obadiah was to utter a solemn message against Edom. "As thou hast done, it shall be done unto thee: thy dealing shall return upon thine own head" (ver. 15).* But what and where was Edom? Edom, or Idumea, was a narrow strip of hill-country, about one hundred miles long by twenty broad, extending from the southern extremity of the Dead Sea to the head of the Arabian Gulf. The capital of the country was the remarkable city of Petra, whose dwellings were hewn out of the solid rock ; and situated as these were at the head of the famous defile, which was then the chief way of access to it, it was regarded by its inhabitants as impregnable. This is the meaning of vers. 3, 4. They had fixed their nest, like the eagle, in the high clefts of the rock, and

* Cf. Jer. xlix. 7-22 ; Lam. iv. 21-22 ; Ezek. xxv. 12-14 ; Isa. lxiii. 1-4 ; Ps. cxxxvii. 7.

thought in the pride of their heart that no one could bring them down to the ground.

But who were the Edomites genealogically and historically? They were first cousins to the Hebrews—descendants of Esau, as the Israelites themselves were of Jacob (Obad. 10, Gen. xxxii. 3). But as early as the time of the Exodus, they had churlishly refused the children of Israel a passage through their territory (Num. xx. 21); and for ever after a feeling of hostility and bitter hate had grown up and existed between them. "Long and loud has been the wail of execration which has gone up from the Jewish nation against Edom. It is the one imprecation which breaks forth from the Lamentations of Jeremiah; it is the culmination of the fierce threats of Ezekiel; it is the sole purpose of the short, sharp cry of Obadiah; it is the bitterest drop in the sad recollections of the Israelite captives by the waters of Babylon; and the one warlike strain of the Evangelical Prophet is inspired by the hope that the Divine Conqueror should come knee-deep in Idumean blood."* No one will presume to say that all the fault lay on one side. Once the estrangement existed, both sides were only too prone to seek reprisals. In the time of David, and then of Amaziah, Edom was conquered and subjugated by Israel under circumstances of the greatest cruelty (2 Sam. viii. 14, 2 Chron. xxv. 11, 12); and then when the Edomites, in turn, got the opportunity, they avenged themselves on Israel by making incursions into Southern Palestine and winning back their lost cities (2 Kings xvi. 6,

* Stanley, "The Jewish Church," ii. 471.

2 Chron. xxviii. 17). Such was the people and such the land, against which Obadiah was commissioned to take up his parable.

2. *Her Sin.*

At some one of the sacks of Jerusalem, the Edomites, instead of helping a brother in distress, had rejoiced over Israel's calamity (vers. 10-14). Some have supposed that this description refers to the sacking of Jerusalem by the Philistines and Arabians in the reign of Jehoram (2 Chron. xxi. 16, 17); in which case the date of Obadiah would be about 850 B.C., and his prophecy would be the oldest prophetic writing we possess. But the picture of Judah's calamity is so harrowing and exhaustive in its details, that it is felt by most that the description can only apply to the final capture of the city by the Chaldeans in 586 B.C.; so that the date of composition must be brought down to the beginning of the Exile. In either case, the wild Edomite chiefs had been guilty of a most heinous sin. In the day when strangers entered the city gates, and cast lots upon Jerusalem, they had been as one of them. They rejoiced over the woes of the vanquished, grasped at a share of the spoil, and lay in wait to cut off the fugitives.

A hate like this, which shows itself in gloating over the sufferings of the wounded, is a sin of peculiar intensity and turpitude. It is one that may be compared with the behaviour of those who mocked the dying Saviour while He hung upon the Cross. There was mockery *and* mockery. The

Greek word which describes the raillery of the Roman soldiery, gives us the right way of regarding it. It expresses the unthinking ridicule of grown-up children—the thoughtless derision of those who had not yet learned to say with the Apostle, “When I became a man, I put away childish things.” But no such excuse can be found for the Jewish ecclesiastics. The action of the chief priests was not the action of children: it was the behaviour of fiends. It was a development of hate so deep that it resembled that of Edom, when she stood in the crossways and cut off those who were trying to escape. It was a sin against pity, against humanity, against blood-relationship—a sin that points to that crime of deepest dye, when it could be said, “A man’s foes shall be they of his own household.” And therefore beginning at ver. 15, we have the announcement of

3. *Her Doom.*

“As thou hast done, it shall be done unto thee: thy dealing shall return upon thine own head.” This is a frequently-expressed principle of judgment in the teaching of the prophets. There will be a similarity of punishment and sin. In their own way they are ever ready to proclaim with the Apostle, “Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap”; or with the Master, “With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.” And if the testimony of modern travellers may be accepted, the doom of Edom has been mournful and dire enough. In 1848, Miss Harriet Martineau

visited Petra, and describes it as follows: "No-where is there desolation like that of Petra, where these rock doorways stand wide—still fit for the habitation of a multitude, but all empty and silent except for the multiplied echo of the cry of the eagle or the bleat of the kid. No, these excavations never were all tombs. In the morning the sons of Esau came out in the first sunshine to worship at their doors, before going forth, proud as their neighbour eagles, to the chase; and at night the yellow fires lighted up from within, tier above tier, the face of the precipice."* There is no escaping the sweep of this law, "As thou hast done, it shall be done unto thee . . . and there shall not be any remaining of the house of Esau." It is a principle that avails to-day, and must avail while the world lasts. Neither Edom nor Israel, ancient nor modern, shall ever get beyond the grip of God's law. Except, of course, in terms of the New Testament Evangel, by laying down the arms of rebellion, and finding deliverance and restoration through the grace of Him whose mercy triumphs over judgment. And thus in vers. 17-21 we have

4. *The Restoration of Israel.*

Obadiah's message of doom cannot close without bringing in this hope of the people of Jehovah. "In mount Zion there shall be those that escape, and it shall be holy; and the house of Jacob shall possess their possessions. . . . And saviours shall

* "Eastern Life," iii. 5.

come up on mount Zion to judge the mount of Esau ; and the kingdom shall be the Lord's." In true Old Testament fashion the restoration is more a description of temporal prosperity than a picture of spiritual reformation. They are to possess their own land again, and all their enemies, especially Edom, are to be discomfited. And it ends, as all Old Testament pedagogy is meant to end, in the declaration that the kingdom is to be Jehovah's.

But is there not a hint of a better fulfilment than that sketched by Obadiah ? In ver. 21 deliverers are spoken of who will come up on mount Zion to *judge* the mount of Esau. But the word "rule," rather than "judge" might better bring out the meaning. It is an echo of the time when the Lord raised up judges who judged (*i.e.* ruled) Israel, and saved them out of the hand of those that spoiled them. Edom subdued shall be Edom incorporated ; and it shall share the blessings of that blessed rule in Zion which shall distinguish the restored people of God. That, at least, is the way in which we have been taught to pray for the subduing of our enemies — that they may be incorporated into Christ's kingdom, and submit to His rule. Then, but not before, it shall be true not only of one land, but of all lands, "the kingdom shall be the Lord's."

16. THE PROPHET JONAH.—The book which bears the prophet's name is not so much a record of his teaching, as an account of his work : but it does not thereby follow that it "has no claim to be included in a study of prophetic teaching."* The

* Kirkpatrick, "Doctrine of the Prophets," p. 21.

work of a prophet may be as instructive as his spoken words : and his deeds no less than his doctrines may be a medium of revelation. So that, in spite of the marked differences between this book and the other prophetical writings, the lessons it conveys both for the church and for the individual do entitle it to a place in our study of the prophetical literature.

1. *The Time at which he Prophesied.*

This is clearly specified in connection with the brilliant success of Jeroboam II. "He restored the border of Israel from the entering in of Hamath unto the sea of the Arabah, according to the word of the Lord, the God of Israel, which he spake by the hand of his servant Jonah, the son of Amittai, the prophet which was of Gath-hepher" (2 Kings xiv. 25). The inferences which may be deduced from this passage are (*a*) that Jonah was a prophet of the Northern Kingdom (Israel); (*b*) that his birthplace was Gath-hepher, a town of Lower Galilee not far from Nazareth, in the tribe of Zebulun; (*c*) that he exercised the prophetical office either before the reign of Jeroboam II., or very early in that reign. Finally, if anything in the book of Jonah could identify it with this prediction, it would be one of the most ancient, if not the most ancient, of all the prophetical writings. But there is nothing in the book itself to warrant this assumption. It is rather a book *about* Jonah than a collection of his utterances; and it is not the date of the book, but the time of

the prophet which is the special point alluded to in the passage in Kings.

The composition of the book is generally supposed to belong to a much later period. It has forms of thought and peculiarities of style that seem to reflect the chastened experience and wider outlook of the post-exilian church. Arguing from internal evidence alone, it is placed by some in the time of Ezra, as being the product of the reaction occasioned by his strict and exclusive policy towards heathen nations. He would allow neither Samaritan builders nor strange wives to have any part or lot in the heritage of Jehovah (Ezra iv. 3, x. 2): and therefore this book was composed, like the book of Ruth, to show that the God of Israel had purposes of mercy even towards those who were outside the commonwealth of Israel. But however late the composition may be, it is not disputed that the thrilling narrative to which it has given shape and permanence, had a real foundation in history in the reign of Jehu or Jeroboam II. Hosea v. 13, seems to suggest that foreign embassies were not uncommon between Israel and Assyria at this period; and if Jonah, who must have been on intimate terms with his sovereign, was sent to Nineveh on some such legation, and was used of God, like Daniel in Babylon, for the accomplishment of some gracious purpose, there is nothing in the religion or discipline of Israel to preclude such a supposition. "Why should not the substance of the story, though the historical annals make no allusion to such enterprise, be founded on a real fact?" *

* Kalisch.

2. *His Mission to Nineveh.*

“Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it ; for their wickedness is come up before me.” We cannot wonder at the commission ; for what is addressed to this one man was addressed to the whole people of Jehovah. Indeed, there are those who maintain that the story of Jonah is just an allegory of Israel herself. She it was who was sent to the great Nineveh of the world. As a missionary people she was commissioned to keep the lamp of revelation burning brightly until the house of God, which was planted on Mount Zion, might become a house of prayer for all peoples (Isa. lvi. 7). But this the people of Jehovah refused to do ; and, therefore, Israel was cast out into the sea of captivity. That was the monster that swallowed her up. But having repented, and breathed some such prayer as is inserted in Jonah ii. 2-9 (R.V.), she was restored and sent a second time on her God-appointed mission ; but only to sit down under her gourd, the temple, and in sheer exclusiveness of spirit become angry because God was showing mercy to the Gentiles. She even killed the One who proposed it. And yet if Israel had only realised its nature, this was the glory of her election. She was elected to serve others. They were not outside the pale of mercy. And it is in the light of that great redemptive fact that the mission of Jonah is to be interpreted.

What are some of the lessons that are written large in this Old Testament book ? (*a*) The lesson of *obedience*. Instead of going east Jonah turned

west, and sought to escape to Tarshish, across the waters of the Great Sea. But there is no rest for a disobedient prophet. He disobeyed and suffered ; just as Israel disobeyed, and has suffered even till now. There is no peace for a quickened soul, if it run in the way of disloyalty and disobedience. Such a soul may go back to the world and seek, for a season, to drown its better instincts in a sea of pleasure ; but its chance of being a successful pleasure-seeker now has been cut away by the roots—severed by that touch of divine virtue which makes all things new.

(*b*) The lesson of *repentance*—the repentance of Jonah, who was delivered and restored to the divine favour ; and the repentance of Nineveh, both king and people, who proclaimed a fast, and put on sack-cloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them. To dwell on the love of God for humanity is but one thing ; submission and repentance on the part of the sinner is equally necessary. The divine judgment of *sin* is never withdrawn ; and so long as the *sinner* remains joined to his sin, he is in danger of suffering the awful doom which is meant for the sin alone. And, therefore, the preachers of righteousness in any generation must make the cities and deserts ring with the cry of Jonah or of John the Baptist. “Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

(*c*) The lesson of God’s universal *love*.

“Thy voice is a complaint, O crownèd city,
The blue sky covering thee, like God’s great pity.”*

* E. B. Browning.

Jonah, alas, was greatly displeased at the exhibition of such mercy. And like every other angry man he stayed by himself hating his human kind. See him sitting in his booth outside the city, like the elder brother of the parable who refused to go in. But what does God the Father do in both instances? He brings them to the touchstone of the royal law of love. "Thy *brother* is come!" "Should not I have *pity* on Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than six score thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand: and also much cattle?" Nay, the divine remonstrance cuts a good deal deeper. Jonah had more pity on the gourd than on the great city with its mass of men and cattle within its walls. The gourd was a small something that sheltered his own head from the heat. It was a tiny possession of wealth, reputation, or family connections which he had built up around his life; and he had more concern about the safe-guarding of that little mole-hill of personal influence than about all the mighty concerns of time or eternity. Nineveh might be swept away with the besom of destruction, but let that little gourd be safeguarded, and all would be well. Not so Jonah, that can never be. There is One above who will not only save Nineveh from her sins, but who will also save you from yourself. He will not allow you to shrivel up your manhood and dry up your loving-kindness in the gourd of such puny self-complacency. Your gourd will wither away before your eyes, and you will yet praise God for the worm that gnawed it away by the root. It may have been as the burning of the

flesh, but the burning has been for the saving and purifying of the soul.

3. *The New Testament fulfilment.*

In Matt. xii. 38-41, we have a double reference to the book of Jonah. The Scribes and Pharisees came to Jesus, saying, Master, we would see a sign from Thee ; but He answered and said unto them : "An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign ; and there shall no sign be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet ; for as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." And then in the same connection he added : "The men of Nineveh shall stand up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it ; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah ; and behold, a greater than Jonah is here." It is evident that in the teaching of Jesus the symbolism of the Book of Jonah has been carried a step further. It is no longer a picture of Israel being brought back from the grave of the captivity ; but one of Israel's Lord being raised from the tomb of death. And as the real miracle in the history of Jonah was not so much anything in the world of nature as a moral and spiritual renewal in the prophet's own life ; so the real sign of the Son of Man to all coming generations was not the bodily resurrection alone, but the fact that he went forth in the power of an endless life to show forth light to the Gentiles. For as Jonah went forth

from his living prison to preach to the Ninevites, so Christ after His resurrection went forth, not in His own person, but by the agency of His word and Spirit, to preach the Gospel in all the world.

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